

*United States v. Barbara Byrd-Bennett*, No. 15-CR-620

# Exhibit 1

*United States v. Barbara Byrd-Bennett*, No. 15-CR-620

**Character Reference Letters Submitted in Support of Barbara Byrd-Bennett**

*Following Barbara's guilty plea in October 2015, people from all parts and chapters of her life, personal and professional, reached out asking how they could support her. Barbara also contacted other individuals that she felt could provide insight into her character. As her counsel, we have submitted each of the letters we received on her behalf without exclusion. Given the volume of these letters, we have organized them categorically and alphabetically within those categories to assist the Court.*

*A set of character reference letters combined as a single PDF with bookmarks for each letter, per the Court's preferences, has been submitted to the Court, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the Probation Office without being filed electronically.*

**New York**

1. Bernardine, Melina
2. Braxton, Carmen
3. Brown, Bertrand
4. Burrell, Betty
5. Cortines, Ramon
6. Elliott, Marjorie
7. Elliott-Lewis, Myrna
8. Evans, Ronald
9. Fletcher, Marguerita
10. Gray, Laruth
11. Hamer, Irving
12. Jackson, Zella
13. Knox, Annette
14. Materassi-Eaton, Leaura
15. Reid, Marilyn
16. Reid, Marvin Curtis
17. Reid, Yvonne
18. Spann, Diane and Dorothy Spann Robin Spann-Jacobus
19. Spann-Thom, Stacey
20. Tolliver, Willie

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**Cleveland**

21. Bell-Lynn, Stacey
22. Brown, Harold
23. Cash, Eugenia
24. Chappell, Inajo
25. Daberko, David
26. Decolibus, Richard
27. DeColibus, Sharon
28. FitzSimons, Kathleen
29. Flesher, Paul
30. Fudge, Marcia
31. Hardwick, Linda
32. Herpel, Karen
33. Herpel, Rosemary
34. Hoover, Carole
35. Jackson, Nicholas
36. Jones, Basheer
37. Lerner, Norma
38. Lowry, Rebecca
39. Machaskee, Alex
40. Mayti, Lisa
41. Milano, Christina
42. Minter, Steven
43. Patterson, Jeffery
44. Poncelet, Paulette
45. Ratner, Albert
46. Ruda, Lisa Marie
47. Scott, Charles
48. Sheffield, LaVonne
49. Snodgrass, Donna
50. Talpas, Gary
51. Thornton, Jerry Sue
52. Ward, Deborah

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- 53. Wendling, William
- 54. Wong, Margaret
- 55. Woodman, Lynne

**Chicago**

- 56. Barker, John Richard
- 57. Cunningham, Joy Virginia
- 58. Dhupelia, Aarti
- 59. Doss, Isiah
- 60. Flores Contreras, Dalia
- 61. Gurley, Annette
- 62. Stamps, Joshua and Joseph
- 63. Stephens, Scott

**Other Professional Relationships**

- 64. Bobb, Robert
- 65. Dulle, Paul
- 66. Germain, Thaly
- 67. Hite, William
- 68. Ingram, Alan
- 69. Kennedy, Jane
- 70. Pasternack, Robert
- 71. Ray, James
- 72. Smith, Rosa
- 73. Wise, Joseph

**Family / Friends / Community**

- 74. Bennett, Bruce
- 75. Byrd, Nailah
- 76. Byrd-Taylor, Donna
- 77. Dragga, Thomas
- 78. Giacci, Angela
- 79. Harris, Richard
- 80. James, Alyria

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- 81. Kolozsi, Linda
- 82. Lee, Helen
- 83. Lee, Patricia
- 84. Marino, Sandi
- 85. Materassi, Marco
- 86. McCollum, Jon
- 87. Moss, Jr., Otis
- 88. Patterson, Melody
- 89. Simmons, Angela
- 90. Suggs, Ed
- 91. Wyatt-Moorer, Joan

Mrs. Melina Bernardine  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

December 31<sup>st</sup> 2016

Honorable Edmond E Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago Illinois 60604

Judge Change

My name is Melina Bernardine, I am originally from Grenada West Indies but have been a citizen of the United State for over 30 years. I am a wife, mother and grandmother. I have been blessed to live and own my home for over 30 years and have raised my children in the New York City Public School system. My daughters attended school in District 17 for elementary and middle school. After going to college and earning their bachelor and masters degree's they now work within District 17 as a High School Special Education Teacher and a Middle School Community School Director. My grandson's attends the same elementary school his mother and aunt attended.

I had the privilege to meet Barbara Byrd Bennett when she was employed within District 17 in 1994. Before Barbara came into our district it was under the leadership of Ken Reives, District Manager and Myrna Lewis Deputy Superintendant. Our district was experiencing internal issues such as the State Education Department investigating members of our school board for misappropriating federal funds (title one). There were several schools under review (SUR) for the amount of students failing state exams as well as school having substantial vacancies within their school. There was a lack of accountability within the district and we were in desperate need to leadership.

At this time I was the PTA President for my daughters middle school as well as the Vice Chair of Title One. I received a called from Barbara Bennett asking for a parent leader meeting to take place to discuss the issues going on within the district. At the meeting Barbra stated "I am here for our children and to bring stability and accountability back into the district. But I need support for you, the parents of our district as well as the community of our district ". And with the support from the parents and members of the community we saw positive results. Barbara Bennett's first year schools had permanent principals as well as licensed teachers, efficient

programs and our children were learning and thriving. She increased the amount of afterschool programs for our children as well as teachers volunteering their time afterschool to help students that needed one on one academic support. Our districts attendance, reading and math scores were at its highest under Barbara Bennett's leadership. More of our students applied and was accepted into specialized schools, federal funds were restored to our schools, two of the four schools under investigation was removed from the SUR list. Our district was ranked number one in Parent Leadership and served as a model for the State of New York.

When Barbara Bennett left the district it was difficult and emotional, we knew we were losing a vital part of our district family , an educator, a believer in out children, a motivator, a listener, and good friend. Anytime anyone mentioned Barbara Bennett within our district it was always followed up with positive accolades for her hard work and dedication to the children and families of our community.

Barbara Bennett will always be a warrior for our children and though she has accepted responsibility for her actions I am both privileged and proud to speak on behalf of such a dedicated and honorable woman.

Sincerely

Mrs. Melina Bernardine



The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604  
January 5, 2017

Re: Character Reference for Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Your Honorable Judge Chang,

My name is Carmen Braxton. I am the business owner of Braxton Educational Services and Training, LLC (BEST) and reside in [REDACTED]. I am actively involved in my church and local community. I am committed to the advocacy for children and justice for all. It is with much sorrow I have to write this letter pleading mercy from this court for my long-time friend, Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I am aware of the events that have transpired and that sentencing is to occur; however, I write in the hopes it will help you to see the kind of person Barbara is, despite the transgressions that has led her to this point.

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for over 25 years and I can assure you that these recent circumstances are not indicative of the kind of person she truly is. I initially met Ms. Byrd-Bennett in 1990, while she served as an administrator in the New York City Public School System. I was employed by a major textbook company in the school district, where she was one of my clients. Over the years, she has been a client, colleague, role model and mentor, and yes a dear friend. She comes from a God-fearing, supportive and loving family. Barbara is a woman of integrity and honesty. I realize that might seem difficult to grasp given the current situation, but it's true nonetheless.

I have known Barbara to be a prudent, hardworking, conscientious, and a caring person. She has always been actively engaged within the local school community where she served. Her commitment to education has always been on behalf of children. I have served with Barbara on several "think tanks" forums, where our focus was for the advocacy of ALL children and the improvement of educational policies. She has always been willing to devote her time and efforts when it came to education. When I applied to graduate school for my MBA, she was one of my number one supporters and when I return for my doctorate, she was my pillar of strength, during a very difficult period.

Barbara has been a positive role model to children, parents, colleagues and myself over the years, and continues to pour into those that seek her support. She has always had a keen interest in doing something for society and giving back.

I recognize that Barbara may not have abided by the rules, but I do not think society would benefit from sending her to prison. Imprisonment at this time would unnecessarily destroy her future, and deprive society of a potentially valuable citizen. I recognize the power you wield with regard to the future of Ms. Byrd-Bennett and hope the Court will consider leniency when imposing sentence.

It is with my heartfelt sincerity that I implore this Honorable Court to consider a lesser sentence.

Respectfully,



Carmen Braxton

JANUARY 4,2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United states District Court  
Northern district of Illinois  
219 south Dearborn street  
Chicago,Illinois 60604

Your Honor,

You should know if I were in a position of authority, and had the opportunity to hire Barbara Byrd Bennett as a school -based or district-level supervisor, I would do so sans any Reservations. LET ME TELL YOU WHY.

I have known Barbara Byrd Bennett for more than four decades, most of her professional career; from the time she began as an elementary school teacher in the famous IS-201 DEMONSTRATION DISTRICT ( one of America's first "decentralized" school districts) to a school principal and city-wide superintendent. Most of her time was spent providing educational services for the children of the VILLAGE OF HARLEM,NY. One of the most economically depressed areas in New York City.

It is important that I share she did not provide just good service for our children clients, but rather outstanding, compassionate, and empowering service. You see Your Honor, Barbara was/is a very special educational provider. She endeavored to empower our children with life-long independent reasoning/thinking skills. This by developing educational programs that empowered our kids; giving them what I call "CONSTRUCTIVE ARROGANCE".THAT

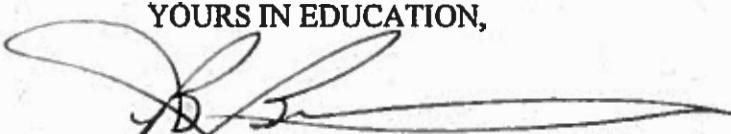
IS YOUNGSTERS LEAVING HER SCHOOL WITH A STRONG SENSE OF SELF EFFICACY AND FATE CONTROL. Such young people have absolute belief in their ability to learn and be successful; again, a life-long skill-set.

Barbara proved herself to be an intellectually aggressive, compassionate, determined and absolutely consistent and reliable "advocate" for our children. Additionally, she worked well with our parents and her peers.

Your Honor, Barbara was quite special to us. I am confident if you had a Margaret Douglass (PS-36) Early Childhood Center-like I did, you would have hired Barbara Byrd Bennett as its principal -as I did. She was such an EMPOWERING FORCE.

Judge Chang, I sincerely hope –no-pray that you will afford her every possible leniency.  
HER BODY OF WORK DESERVES SAME.

YOURS IN EDUCATION,

  
DR BERTRAND J. BROWN SUPERINTENDENT EMERITUS, VILLAGE OF HARLEM  
CSD#5 (NY,NY)

Betty D. Burrell  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

20 January 2017

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Judge Chang,

My name is Betty D. Burrell. I am a retired educator. I have worked in Baltimore City and New York City schools, colleges, State- and Federally-funded programs for over 50 years.

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for almost 50 years. We met in 1967 at my first teaching experience in New York City (PS 68M). Since then, we have been friends and colleagues (PS 46 M) in many different arenas, as co-teachers of youngsters and adults (Malcolm-King College, New York City, College of New Rochelle, New York); as advisors and coordinators of special programs (CSD 5 - Central Harlem District Office – Curriculum Coordinators); as administrators of school- and district-wide programs for educators. Barbara became principal of PS 36M in CSD 5 in 1985; I became Assistant Principal of CS 154M, also in CSD 5, in 1988. In 1992, she was appointed as Deputy Executive Director of the Division of Instruction & Professional Development at Central Board of Education, in New York City. She soon became Superintendent of CSD 17 in Brooklyn, New York and later, she was appointed by the New York City Public Schools Chancellor, Ramon C. Cortines, to be Superintendent of the Chancellor's District in New York City. Her extensive accomplishments give testimony to her remarkable abilities as a talented, dedicated educator.

She has been my confidant, my mentor and teacher, a person whose values, morals and guidance have proven to be invaluable to me in both my career and my personal life! She was the inspiration behind my decision to attend City College of New York (Masters Degree in Administration and Supervision, 1983) and Long Island University (Special Studies in Math and Science, 1986). She herself attended Long Island University and Pace University where she received her Bachelors and Masters Degrees; her love of teaching and learning motivated her to pursue her post-graduate degree as Doctor of Education.

We have experienced so much together: we've worked together, side by side, to bring about change in the attitudes and lives of children and adults; we've traveled together around the country to conferences and symposiums which focused on improving teaching and learning; we've spent precious moments with family and friends to show our love

and appreciation for them; we've laughed and cried together, sharing successes and losses in our daily encounters; we have attended church together, praying for guidance and assurance that our efforts to improve the education and lives of others were validated; we even lived together for a while in 1985.

In all our years as friends and colleagues, I most assuredly know the following about Barbara:

- 1) She is dependable; she will go every step of the way to support and confirm her trust and confidence.
- 2) She is truthful; she has an unwavering loyalty to being frank, earnest, and, above all, against any devious and untoward action that would undermine her value of the truth!
- 3) She is faithful to her convictions, even in the face of adversity!
- 4) She has an unfaltering belief in good in all humankind.

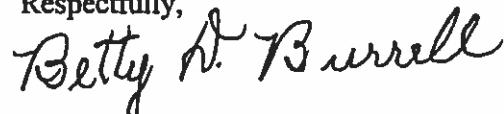
She believes all people can learn, and she has worked tirelessly and caringly to enhance their lives by preparing them to realize and work toward achieving their goals in life!

On numerous occasions, Barbara has provided students and their families with support to enrich their lives through: tutoring after school and on weekends; helping parents find jobs, better living quarters and counseling for drug and/or alcohol addiction; encouraging specially talented underprivileged youngsters to expand their capabilities by locating, recommending and sometimes even paying for lessons in music (Brooklyn Academy of Music), art (New York City Arts Partners Project and Children's Art Carnival), dance (Harlem Dance Theater), science (American Museum of Natural History), and mathematics (STEM- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).

Her love and support for her family is unfathomable! She is always there to listen, to advise, to provide meaningful assistance in the plans and desires of each of them. Her selflessness has been demonstrated to many who are extended family, and I am certainly one of those people! She has been the "sister" I never had, one who deeply cares for me and my happiness.

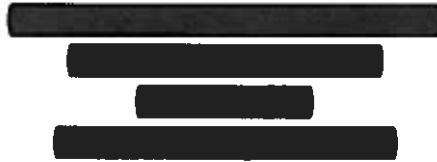
Barbara has been an inspiration to me and, I am sure, to thousands of others, adults and children, who aspire to become effective, productive citizens in society!

Respectfully,



Betty D. Burrell

**RAMON C CORTINES**



January 24, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am aware of Dr. Barbara Byrd Bennett's mistake in judgment, but I would like to suggest an alternative to incarceration.

I have known Dr. Bennett for over twenty years, as her supervisor when I was Chancellor of the New York City Schools and when consulting for the Cleveland School District. Her service could be useful and helpful to young people, their families and communities. I would respectfully encourage you to consider service over incarceration.

Please feel free to contact me. My contact information is provided above.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ramon C. Cortines

January 15, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

RE: Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Dear Judge Chang:

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett since 1974, when we were both 24 years old. We met as teachers, assigned to the same Harlem (NYC) elementary school. Over the course of the last 43 years, we have been colleagues; been in various supervisory relationships and consultancies; but most important, friends. We know each other's parents, children and extended family members. We have been together to share joyous occasions, as well as to console each other during times of loss and grief. Even when separated by distance, we demonstrated our commitment to care for one another and will continue to do so.

Barbara's passion for "disadvantaged" children is her driving force. She grew-up "in the projects" of New York City, in a working-class family with strong family values. Observing that poverty is intricate and more unpredictable than the picture of 'poverty' presented on the public agenda, Barbara always wanted to be part of a movement to empower disenfranchised people, especially children. She began to unravel the mystery of how to boost student achievement in high-poverty schools while a teacher, early in her career. Her drive ensured that she would play a role in creating the capacity, vision and commitment needed to improve the delivery of instruction in the lowest performing schools. Barbara knows that there is no margin for error for these kids and she was up to the challenge of mobilizing the adults in their schools and communities at-large, to give them a chance.

Over the next 16 years, Barbara and I both rose-up the ranks of the New York City Board of Education (NYCBOE) – separately. We reconnected professionally in the early 1990's, when we were both assigned to the Division of Curriculum and Instruction: me, as the Director of a citywide professional development program for the system's special education teachers and paraprofessionals (since 1987); Barbara, as the Division's Deputy Executive Director. Barbara's arrival in 1992, from being the Principal of a recognized Harlem early childhood elementary school (in partnership with Columbia University/Teachers College) coincided with the selection of a new Chancellor, Ramon Cortines. Chancellor Cortines requested that Barbara assume a leadership role in his pet project: Instructional Review Teams. These multi-disciplinary teams were comprised of Central NYCBOE staff, assigned to visit schools identified as in need of assistance. It should be no surprise that all schools identified were ranked as high poverty schools in economically and socially challenged communities (a perfect fit for Barbara). Additionally, all schools had an overrepresentation of students certified as in need of special education services (my interest: ensuring equity and access to quality instructional services for all students, irrespective of learning challenges). Karma at work: I was assigned to Barbara's Team. The ensuing years brought many changes. But, until Barbara's departure for the Cleveland Municipal School District in 1998, we were inseparable.

In 1994, Chancellor Cortines set a new precedent by suspending the sitting Superintendent and the ineffective School Board of Community School District 17 (in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn) amid reports of fiscal improprieties, friction among School Board members and what he characterized as "chaos and turmoil" in the District. Of important note: this community had a long-standing history of racial strife. Its primary composition of Haitians, Jamaicans, West Indians, Southern Blacks and Orthodox Jews of various sects, presented serious challenges for the community and its schools. Chancellor Cortines once again turned to Barbara and reassigned her to the leadership role of District Administrator for this "take-over" District, along with five Trustees. I went with Barbara and served as the District Administrator for Special Education. Work days were often from 7:30 am to 9:00 pm. When not visiting schools, Barbara's Team was at the conference table with her...in addition to her Chancellor-assigned Security Team, who always traveled with her. Little did we know, then, that this experience set the norm for the days and years to follow.

The changes Barbara's leadership made in CSD 17 were striking: more than half of its total Principals were new hires, some for positions that had been vacant for years; student suspensions were down; math and reading scores started to rise (math scores across the District jumped from 36.3% of the students at or above grade level in 1994, to 41% at or above grade level in 1995. Comparable statistics for reading went from 38.5% in 1994 to 40.2% in 1995); teachers were offered professional development courses; and Principals were required to submit progress reports. Barbara's favored performance arts festival brought together over 200 middle-school students from across the District: an intangible measure of success, in addition to increased accountability for all. She brought stability to the District; she brought togetherness; and she "weeded out" many undesirables. I would like to share a guiding parable Barbara often stated to her Team at the onset of a new adventure: "Go to the people, learn from them, plan with them. Start with what they know and build on what they have. When the current leaders leave, the people will say 'We have done it ourselves.'" If there is an underlying philosophy to her approach to educational reform, she has been known to say: "I simply believe in the capacity of adults to do the right thing...Intelligence is not innate. It's something that's learned – acquired with great effort...Being a product of public education, I know it can work." Barbara understood that the work to reclaim the promise of public education started with creating collaborative, safe and welcoming environments for teaching and learning. Her next and last NYCBOE adventure would allow her to create such a structure.

New York State had a system for monitoring troubled schools, since 1989, known as "Schools Under Registration Review (SURR)." Revisions in 1996 gave schools with the lowest test scores three (3) years to improve or face closure by the State. Districts needed to develop plans for how they would support such schools. In response and pending the opening of the 1996 - 1997 school year, newly positioned Chancellor Rudy Crew chose Barbara to assume the leadership role for his "Chancellor's District". There is no doubt that educators and parents viewed this appointment as a tribute to her success in the long-troubled CSD 17.

Barbara had demonstrated that school improvement required that the entire school community be involved in the change process and so she made a concerted effort to collaborate with parents, community organizations, colleges/universities and unions. As the result, she knew that persistently low-performing schools in the city needed a centralized educational and administrative mechanism to set instructional priorities, identify professional development needs and provide oversight to document progress. She also knew that the schools needed special interventions and technical assistance until they developed the capacity and commitment to support the redesign plan prepared by the Chancellor's District Administrative Team, of which I was a member.

Randi Weingarten, former President of New York City's United Federation of Teachers and now President of the American Federation of Teachers, called the Chancellor's District one of the most successful reform initiatives in the country. At its core, Chancellor's District schools:

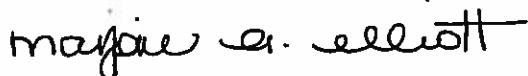
- implemented research-based strategies to raise achievement;
- reduced class size;
- provided a longer school day for tutoring and small group remediation;
- implemented a common curriculum aligned with high standards;
- scheduled common teacher planning time; and
- developed a school site labor-management collaborative governance structure.

Student test scores improved dramatically in the Chancellor's District during Barbara's tenure as Administrator. In 1997, only 30.9 % of third graders read at or above grade level. By 1998, 46.2% achieved this performance level. For students in third to eighth grades, 22% were reading at grade level in 1997. By 1998, 27.9 % were doing so, as well.

Over her challenging and successful career in public service, Barbara saved lives. She gave hope to children and their families when and where none existed. She confronted and broke myths of what children who grew up "in the projects" could achieve when provided with access to the resources and supports that children from differing neighborhoods had available. She respected the communities to which she was assigned. She nurtured us all. She made us "better." I am grateful.

Your Honor: I am consciously aware that Barbara has accepted full responsibility for her misconduct by pleading guilty. I am also aware that as the result, she accepts that her conduct warrants a certain level of "punishment." I am concerned, however, that incarceration of any substantial length of time, will prohibit Barbara's ability to continue her support to and provide for the welfare of her family: her Husband; her Mother; and her Grandsons. I appeal to you for your consideration of Barbara's exemplary career in public service when considering the "punishment" you deem ultimately to assign her. In appreciation...

Respectfully submitted,



Marjorie A. Elliott  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

October 16, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn St.  
Chicago, IL 60604

Your Honor,

My name is Myrna Elliott-Lewis and I am writing to you on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I first met Barbara over 20 years ago when I went to work for her in Community School District 17, in New York City. Barbara had been assigned by the Chancellor of the New York City Schools as the Superintendent of a dysfunctional school district which served poor children, many from the English speaking, Haitian, and Spanish speaking Caribbean. I served as her Assistant Superintendent.

I am aware that Barbara has admitted wrongdoing in this case but I would like to speak about the Barbara I worked with, who was a dedicated education professional. Many of our students came from backgrounds, and with experiences, that were very diverse, yet, she had very high expectations for all the children, was knowledgeable about diversity, and was committed to providing the kind of education each group needed in order to be successful.

For children who were immigrants from the Caribbean, she started Newcomer Centers where children could receive the best practices of bilingual, bicultural education and become ready to join the general student instructional program. I do not believe that there was anything else like it in the New York City school system, for children from Haiti and the Spanish and English speaking Caribbean, living in a predominantly African-American school district at the time.

Barbara spearheaded the creation of small schools in the district with innovative programs that were geared for children who were having difficulty in the larger learning environment. She encouraged teachers who had creative ideas about how children could learn, to implement these ideas with her support. Consequently, under her leadership, the district had several small school programs which were at the forefront of the small schools movement in New York City.

Over the next several years, Barbara and the team spent many late nights and weekends creating programs, analyzing data and making sure all our children were making progress – in District 17 and the Chancellor's District in New York City and it followed in The Cleveland Municipal School District, in Ohio.

In Ohio, she continued her focus on developing the best practices in teachers through Learning Communities, which schools became. In addition to the professional development programs, teachers learned from and with each other, helping each other to

deliver instruction in more effective ways for students. Through collaboration with area colleges, she started a Path to College High School Program and a Scholars Program for students who were ready to begin college work. Her focus was always on children, getting them ready to lead successful lives. To that end she encouraged student leadership development in the high schools, and, when a high school student became homeless, once he attained 18 years of age, she helped to find him housing, and a job, until he graduated and moved on with his life.

By providing an array of educational opportunities for children, in all the school districts where I had the privilege to work with her, Barbara gave children many avenues through which they could learn and thrive, because, in every district, a child could find a place which suited his or her particular needs. We always worked with poor children and because of Barbara's vision, commitment, and high expectations for them, our children were in a position to secure a better life. I know that she has done much good for children in her years as an educator.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Myrna Elliott-Lewis".

Myrna Elliott-Lewis, Ed.D.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

October 18, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 6060004

Your Honor,

I'm honored to add my name to the list of friends, family members and admirers of Barbara B. Bennett who have taken the time from their busy schedules to petition your court on Barbara's behalf.

In 1968, I was selected by the parents (White, Black and Hispanic) to become the principal of I.S.201 in Harlem. During this struggle for more community involvement in inner-city public schools, many young, talented teachers left the school district for less "controversial" districts. Barbara did not!

It was during this turbulent and fast-changing period (1968-1972) in New York City that Barbara demonstrated her commitment to our children and their parents: late nights at PTA meetings; angry public hearings at 110 Livingston St. (the central Board of Education); a hostile press; and a powerful union (UFT) rife with Jewish/Black animosity.

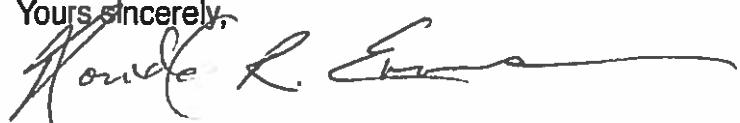
Not only did Barbara stay and lend her superb talents (leadership, personality, commitment....) to our Harlem community's struggle against powerlessness, but she emerged within a few years to a principalship of her own.

Overtime, I have watched Barbara move upward in our school system: teacher, principal, District Administrator. Her career has been remarkable.

It is my hope that my sharing with you the past struggles that we - parents, teachers, administrators and students - have endured and continue to endure to protect public education not only in New York City, but in Cleveland and Chicago and throughout the U.S., will contextualize my personal relationship with my friend and former colleague, Barbara B. Bennett.

In closing, it is my understanding that the Court has wide discretion where the defendant(s) has admitted to the charges. Hopefully, the Court will show its discretion for this good woman.

Yours sincerely,



Ronald R. Evans

Marguerita Fletcher

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

January 17, 2017

Honorable Edmond E Chang

United States District Court

United States District of Illinois

219 South Dearborn Street

Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor:

I have known Barbara Byrd Bennett for more than 20 years and I can say unequivocally that I admire her as much today as I did when we met in 1995, in Community School District 17K in Brooklyn, New York because I know her character.

When we first met, I was thoroughly in awe of her; she was brilliant, self-confident, and exuded the kind of positive energy that was contagious. Later, when I really got to know her, I discovered that not only was she brilliant and an exacting administrator, but she also had a wonderful sense of humor; in social settings she was fun.

Barbara, (she insisted that she be called by no other name) came into my professional sphere, several months after she had been appointed superintendent and invited to be guest speaker at the elementary school where I was on staff as a licensed guidance counselor. I had only heard about the new and very dynamic but no-nonsense new superintendent, but we had never met. However, witnessing her address to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduating class was truly enlightening to me. I remember being "struck" by how warm and down to earth she was when speaking to the children. It was apparent to me that she really cared about the students and it was equally apparent that the children were as engaged with her as were the adults. Unfortunately, we did not meet on that occasion.

We did, however, have occasion to meet sometime later after I had recently been named 'Counselor of The Year' representing CSD17K. Shortly thereafter, Barbara asked me to be a member of her newly reconstructed district guidance team. She felt this new team approach would serve the needs of children, parents and schools and by extension community, more efficiently and effectively than under the old guidance paradigm.

It was in my experience as a member of this 'team' that I was able to get to know and witness Barbara's total sense of purpose, dedication and commitment to children as well as to their parents. As an administrator and educator Barbara demonstrated through her own work ethic, and personal and professional integrity, that she expected nothing less from all of us. She was tough but fair, and everything she did was promulgated on the premise that we as administrators, supervisors and educators, had a duty and responsibility to establish innovative educational systems that would best enhance the ability of children to achieve. Barbara was an aspirational as well as inspirational leader who believed in all children's ability to achieve and excel, and, because of her perseverance, her tenacity, her genuineness, her willingness to meet with district parents, teachers, community leaders, custodial and secretarial personnel, and visiting schools to talk with children, she was able to transform a failing district into a successful one.

She challenged us all, but we respected her and admired her for the faith she had in us.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Marguerita Fletcher*  
Marguerita Fletcher,

Retired Guidance Counselor

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Norther District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor,

I wish to respectfully request your consideration of leniency in your consideration of punishment for defendant Dr. Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I have known Dr. Byrd-Bennett over several decades both as a professional associate and as a colleague among a small handful female superintendents in the 80s.

I am not diminishing the significance of her poor judgment in the matter of *United States of America V. Barbara Byrd-Bennett*, however I would like to point out that Dr. Barbara Byrd-Bennett entire career has been dedicated to making the educational system work for the advancement of literacy, citizenry and intellectual prowess for youth of every striate color and persuasion. While she always wanted to make sure that the undeserved had the best of opportunities, her goal was to neglect NOT a single child.

For example, her work was met with critical acclaim when she implemented intensive initiatives under Chancellor Rudy Crew's effort to revamp academic standards for all New York City students.

In each district, from New York City to Columbus, Ohio to Detroit, Michigan to Chicago Illinois, she constantly spear headed innovative programs that resulted not only in increased student achievement, but also in increased understanding of youth's responsibility and Obligation.

As an indication of her sense of what is just and right, Dr. Byrd-Bennett has accepted full responsibilities for her misconduct by pleading guilty, which means she has also accepted that her conduct warrants a certain level of punishment.

I would respectfully request that in determining her punishment of the lapse of error in judgment and for taking her eye off the prize (a prize that she understood

when it came to the well being of youth in our country) for fleeting moments that we as a society not wall in this great talent over time, but rather that her punishment impact the community she so cared about through extended layers of volunteer service. She should be sent to the poorest communities and the poorest counties that house the poorest school districts in our country. In light of the current fiscal crisis in school district after school district, Dr. Byrd-Bennett's talent could be used to great depths. Of course, this should be under the strict supervision of the court.

Sir, please consider foremost the talent she can now offer. Thank you for your consideration.

Laruth Gray

Irving Hamer

January 29, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am writing to request leniency in the sentencing and to share insights into the character of my friend and colleague Ms. Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Our friendship and professional colleagueship extends more than three decades. It originated in New York where I served as a Deputy Commissioner of Education for the State of New York and later as a Member of the New York City Board of Education. Also, I was an advisor to her doctoral studies at Teachers College-Columbia University where she did advanced studies. We have been partners in the effort to turnaround chronically low performing schools serving poor children all over the country. Barbara Byrd-Bennett's work has been a source of inspiration and emulation to me and legions of others. This character letter has no limitations in its admiration and empathy for Barbara Byrd-Bennett. Fundamentally, it is a plea for the mercy in your court.

My own family includes siblings and progeny that, because of mistakes, bad judgment, and toxic circumstances have felony records. Each is a person of extraordinary ability, compassion, and ambition. Though not a family member, Barbara Byrd-Bennett's situation mirrors the quixotic rise and fall of my siblings and progeny. This brief biography is intent on establishing a deep, personal insight into persons of high moral character who, for momentary lapses, become violators of the law and community expectations.

**Barbara Bryd-Bennett is not a career criminal, a cheat, or a narcissistic sociopath.**

She is a deeply compassionate person with remarkable ties to the community, friends, and family. She is not a risk to herself, the community, or another person. This criminal act is an isolated aberration. Nothing in her character or disposition would cause her to repeat what was clearly a mistake. Her infraction is a once in a lifetime event in the context of limitless service to the community and her profession. There is more anguish in her heart and mind for her

wrongdoing than any jail time could match. It is such anguish that defines the character of a person—remorse, contrition, and sorrow are elements embedded in Barbara Byrd-Bennett's personal fiber. And, they have been evident in all of her social engagements. It is her history that I plea you consider in your sentencing. Her contributions to the commonweal is difficult to parallel, as such, there is a remote chance the mercy you afford her will set a precedent.

As a companion in the struggle to uplift the poor and underserved, I can assure you, there are no rewards for the time, energy, and personal sacrifice necessary to be effective. Everywhere Barbara Byrd-Bennett has served; there are outcomes that exceed expectation. Thousands of children, their families, and the general community are doing better because of her work and leadership. Surely her track record does not entitle her to any undue benefit. Equally compelling, however, is the fact that her contributions and devotion have been selfless. This is the primary testament to her character not the momentary flaw that ensnared her into the corrupt and greedy underbelly of an American business. Even more poignant is Barbara Byrd-Bennett's acceptance of responsibility for her wrongdoing.

Here again her character is a beacon. With no pattern of criminal activity in her background, she did not attempt to avoid, escape or hide. Instead, she recognizes the admission of guilt is curative for a person for who has made trust, honesty, piety, and love central characteristics that inform all of her relationships and professional obligations. In all of my years of knowing, observing and working with Barbara Byrd-Bennett there is no record of her doing harm to anyone despite the power and resources to do so. Never has she used her station to acquire personal wealth. Her criminal act was, and continues to be, stunning to me because it does not correspond with her character, which, until this infraction, has been stellar.

What I know is that the rough and tumble of public service is a minefield. The best and the brightest individuals must be constantly vigilant. The smallest twist on a common practice can result in a criminal act. It is a shame that Barbara Byrd-Bennett blinked and participated in her first and only wrongdoing. But, her wisdom, thoughtfulness, generosity, and empathy for the downtrodden are characteristics in short supply and should not be silenced. If ever there was a candidate deserving of a second chance, it is Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Please Your Honor, be merciful and bestow the minimum punishment allowed by law for this person of deep, deep character, remorse, and contrition.

Your consideration is requested and deeply appreciated.

Respectfully,  
**Irving Hamer**

Digitally signed by Irving Hamer  
Date 2017.01.30 11:17:48 -05'00'  
Email: [hamer@p3strategies.com](mailto:hamer@p3strategies.com), e-ID:

Irving Hamer

Zella Jackson

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

January 4, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

I have followed Barbara Byrd-Bennett's career with great pride as she has advanced through the teaching ranks to emerge as an educational leader.

As a teacher in Community School District Five in New York City's Central Harlem. Barbara began to have an impact on at risk children in an exemplary way, which brought notice of her work to my attention. When a new superintendent was appointed to our district, he requested that I, a district administrator, identify and recruit the best and brightest teachers from our schools to be district coordinators charged with training teachers in educationally effective instructional practices. Barbara had a reputation of being an intelligent, committed exciting talent. I visited Barbara's school to request her release. Her principal was angry and very disappointed that she was to lose her most outstanding teacher; with much chagrin, she consented to her release.

And so Barbara became a member of a district resource team, which provided invaluable instructional support to the schools. The specific mission of the group was to design curriculum, prepare demonstrations and introduce methodology and strategies to improve instructions to hundreds of children needing a strong literacy foundation in order to have any chance for academic success.

At the superintendent's request the team was tasked with developing a curriculum guide which enabled the district family, professional as well as support staff, and parents to know the content, standards and expectations for each curriculum area. "Five Steps to Excellence" was the resulting document, which reflected the current research, practices and strategies to be used in each instructional area. The information in the guide was used in each instructional area. The information in the guide was used by the district for many years and was a prototype for future instructional initiatives. Through her efforts and those of her curriculum teammates, the district was able to improve overall school leadership, teaching skills and student performances in our schools.

When the position of principal became available in an early childhood school, Barbara was selected because of her skills and knowledge and understanding of how children learn. Barbara also demonstrated ability to relate to the community with ease and respect. Her facility in a second language was also an asset. Her leadership of that school was legendary. Central Board personnel and State Education officials were frequent visitors and her school established a working relationship with Teachers College, Columbia University, Bank Street College of Education and numerous cultural organizations that enriched the lives of her students. Because of her high expectations and the school climate that she established. Her school was selected to

house one of the first New York State Pre-Kindergarten programs in the state, which continued to be funded every year she was principal and offered invaluable resources to her students.

There was always a list of children waiting to enter Public School 36. Parents had so much respect for Barbara because she had respect for them, her parents conferences were modeled after the private school conferences with tea and special collations, to the delight of the parents and teachers.

Several of Ms. Byrd Bennett's students told me their fondest memories of the PS 36 experience were the sense of family, community and unity she initiated. Her visits to the classroom and her demonstration lessons defined her as an "amazing teacher". And there was a waiting list of families and teachers who hoped to enroll or work in her school. What was particularly noteworthy were the many teachers whose own children attended the school, the clearest acknowledgement of her outstanding leadership.

Barbara's school was also arts centered. It was the only school where the violin was taught. She held concerts throughout the year that the community eagerly attended. She had a choral group led by an accomplished music teacher. She invited "The Little Orchestra Society" as a resource among other cultural organizations to address the needs of the whole child, something sorely lacking in contemporary schools overly obsessed with assessment at the expense of sound teaching.

Barbara's enthusiasm created cohesive staff. Teachers knew they had to also establish high expectations for their students if they wanted to remain at the school. She cared about her staff, remembering special occasions. Individual Christmas stockings are remembered fondly. Teachers were impressively loyal.

Because of frequent monitoring by state and city educational authorities Barbara's talents became widely acknowledged. Not surprisingly, the New York City Central Board needed her leadership to guide an under- performing school district in Brooklyn. It was our loss but it was inevitable that her talent and ability would lead to greater challenges and opportunities to promote educational reform on a national scale.

Indeed, life is an unpredictable journey with many twists and turns. She has positively affected so many lives and left so many good memories for all who knew her in New York City District Five. That is the person I encountered, that is the person I remember and that is the person I will forever know her to be.

Sincerely,

Ms.Zella Jackson  
  
Deputy Superintendent (Ret.)

Community School District Five  
NYC Department of Education

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

January 8, 2017

Judge Chang:

My name is Annette D. Knox a long standing friend and a former colleague of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I met Barbara forty-seven years ago when she came to Community School 30 -31 as a new teacher in District 5, located in central Harlem in New York City. We were both new teachers who had chosen to work in a district where the children were of color and considered to be disadvantaged. The "choice" meant something special to us because we wanted to invest in the lives of young children who needed to see people who looked like them and who believed in them. Countless numbers of those children are now teachers, doctors, lawyers and other professional servants serving communities throughout New York State and across the country.

Although, I am aware of the fact that Barbara has admitted to wrong doing, I know that she has accomplished a lot of good for many children and others throughout her personal and professional life.

Chancellor Rudy Crew chose Barbara from a sea of professionals in the New York City School System to design, develop and implement the plans for the Chancellor's District. This was a consortium of schools across New York City's five boroughs that were selected to be reformed as centers of excellence. Did it happen under Barbara's guidance? Yes, it did and the records for achievement in this special district stood out as a testament to the depth of knowledge and effectiveness in her craft and her leadership skills during her tenure as the Superintendent of the Chancellor's District. This district was a first of its kind in New York City. Barbara was unafraid to be out there in an experimental project that everyone was waiting to see if it would work. She always had the courage to step forward and lead the way in academic interventions as well as cutting pathways in new and innovative programs that allowed children to achieve academic exposure that would take them all the way. This creativity and ingenuity are the reasons that she became the person who was chosen to lead the Cleveland Municipal School District when it was coming out of years of segregation and academic failure and to initiate similar innovations in Detroit and as well as the many programs that were implemented in Chicago. Barbara has demonstrated numerous times during her professional career that she knows how to develop the kind of effective plans as well as to assemble effective leadership teams that are required to move school districts. Her skill and determination cannot be denied as evidenced by the body of work that she has authored and implemented across the country.

As President of the Barbara Byrd-Bennett Foundation for Cleveland's Children, thirty young men were afforded the opportunity to seek higher education and many of them

graduated from college and are making positive contributions to the communities in which they live.

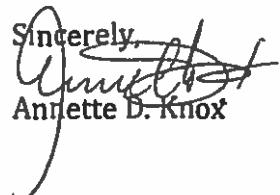
Over the years as I worked with Barbara, I observed that she worked as hard as and often harder than anyone else on the team spending long hours beyond the work day toiling over the possibilities for change and for change itself. Every district that she worked in can testify to her unique contributions in changing the direction of failing schools, and helping to develop staff to support the many innovative programs which were implemented in their respective education community.

Barbara is also one of the most dedicated family people that I have known. She has been the backbone of her family from the time that I met her. I have watched her grow from being a dedicated daughter into a devoted and steadfast mother into an even more, if possible, dedicated and devoted grandmother.

As a friend she has always been there for countless people across the years. Her friendship has covered many people throughout the good and especially crisis periods in many of our lives.

As a biblical student and as a child of many religious teachings that have guided my growth and development, I believe strongly in the "grace and mercy" that shines on each of us daily and fervently hope that it will allow Barbara a chance for redemption and to spend her remaining years as a productive family member and citizen of our world.

I thank you Judge Chang for any consideration and mercy that the court will give to Barbara at the time of her sentencing.

Sincerely,  
  
Annette D. Knox

## **Leaura N. Materassi-Eaton**

January 5, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

My name is Leaura Materassi-Eaton. I am a long time personal friend and professional colleague of Barbara Byrd-Bennett and I am writing you on her behalf. Please know that I am grateful for the opportunity to bear testimony to Barbara's powerful leadership story and to the deep friendship I have been privileged to share with her for more than three decades. I have worked with Barbara since 1982 when we both were employed with New York City Public Schools. From 1998 through 2015, I served on her executive leadership teams in Cleveland Municipal School District, in the Washington D.C office for New Leaders for New Schools, on the Emergency Management Team for Detroit Public Schools and most recently in Chicago Public Schools. I thank you sincerely for taking time to read and consider my comments.

Barbara and I have known each other for more than half our lifetimes. Although we met when we were already grown women, our experiences growing up were markedly similar. We were both born and raised in Central Harlem, New York. We were both poor. We were both high academic achievers. (Barbara actually graduated high school at the age of 15!) We were both the first in our families to graduate college. After college, we both taught in New York City Public Schools in Central Harlem. We both have been single mothers. In 1982, we were both assigned from the classroom to serve as curriculum specialists in the central offices of Harlem's Community School District #5. This is where and when our lives intersected.

Today Central Harlem remains among our nation's poorest and least served urban communities. In 1982 when Barbara and I began working there, Harlem's School District #5 served over 11,000 students in grades kindergarten through 9. Its schools all had poverty rates of 90% or greater. Underfunding, overcrowding, inadequate resources and a revolving door of school board personnel were among the many systemic challenges that faced the district's staff and its school leaders. It was in this context that Barbara began to forge her leadership story. As the district's Writing and Literacy Coordinator, Barbara worked tirelessly to drive the implementation of an academic program designed to ensure all students in all schools/classrooms were exposed to high level, consistent literacy materials and learning experiences. She also designed and led professional learning opportunities for the district's support staff, teachers and principals. While today most school districts implement these best practices, such work on a district-wide basis was groundbreaking in the early 1980s.

Barbara's powerful work at District #5's central office, soon led to her appointment as school principal. She assumed the leadership of Margaret Douglas, Public School 036, Manhattan, in the mid-1980s. The school served over 1,000 poor, ethnically and racially diverse children, ages 3-8, including significant populations of English learners and Diverse (Special) learners. As the newly appointed principal, Barbara proved to be a relentless advocate for high quality early learning experiences for these very young, most

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vulnerable students. She singlehandedly wrote and won millions of dollars in competitive grant funding to start and expand her school's pre-kindergarten program. Barbara's was the first school in Central Harlem to receive state grants to offer pre-kindergarten services.

As a school principal, Barbara recognized early on that her mission was to ensure both equity and excellence of educational opportunity for all students, and for Barbara all meant all. To this end, she built an academic curriculum that ensured all her students achieved the foundational tools for successful learning. The work of Barbara and her teachers didn't stop with the "basics". Instead the curriculum she built went beyond "basics" to provide the visual and performing arts for every child. Every student at Margaret Douglas owned and learned to play an instrument. Children learned to read music, dance, choreograph, create, and perform. Each May students participated in a month long series of live concerts, exhibits and performances. All children participated and their parents were actively engaged. Over time the school became a model for learning through the Arts. Under Barbara's leadership PS 036 was transformed into an institution of educational excellence that paralleled private and selective enrollment public schools across New York City.

In 1998, after several successful years at the New York Board of Education's central offices and two community school district superintendencies, Barbara was selected to become the first CEO of Cleveland Municipal School District under then newly enacted mayoral governance legislation. I was privileged to be part of her four member transition team and served with her through 2006. Throughout her tenure in Cleveland, Barbara continued to create and implement her vision of equity and excellence for poor children in struggling schools. She rebuilt the Cleveland school district from inside out. Her legacy includes: the successful execution of a \$1.2 billion dollar facilities plan that replaced, rebuilt and/or refurbished every school building in Cleveland; the negotiation of two landmark contracts with the Cleveland Teachers Union; the creation of a K-12 standards-based literacy system; the formation of school/corporate partnerships for over 100 schools; the creation of a K-12 and beyond School-to-Career office; the complete overhaul of the district's services to its Diverse (Special Needs) learner population; the introduction and annual implementation of an evidenced-based school-quality review process; and the enactment of a performance-based evaluation system for school principals and district leaders. Barbara's strategic work-plan in New York and Cleveland and later in Detroit and Chicago always had a collective focus on high quality teaching, data-informed management and rigorous learning for children and for adults. These were the key levers she used to move the struggling, under-resourced schools in these districts to higher achievement levels despite dwindling resources and increasingly robust curriculum and assessment standards.

Beyond these accomplishments, however, Barbara's signature work has been her deep commitment to the development of innovative, transformational educational leaders. Barbara always understood that leading requires learning. As such, she was unwavering in her commitment to ensure that school leaders had the tools, resources and experiences they needed to ensure the success of their students. Throughout her career she systematically provided leadership development for school leaders, field officers and district administrators in every district she served - New York, Cleveland, DC, Detroit and Chicago. She approached this leadership work comprehensively, as an organizational effort. School and district leaders were provided with the learnings and experiences they needed and deserved in order to best support the school communities they served and to whom they were accountable. In doing this important work, Barbara was always at the forefront of best practice and highly respected among her peers. Over the course of her career she developed, mentored and inspired countless aspiring and practicing educational leaders. Among these were a number of talented women who otherwise would not have seen opportunity

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to grow and develop in school systems where executive leadership levels are highly competitive and still dominated by men.

Barbara has always championed whatever it takes to ensure the success of every child. She actualized this belief through her work with schools and in her very personal commitment to making a difference for individual students. While CEO in Cleveland, she established the *Barbara Byrd-Bennett Scholars* to mentor and support male students academically and financially from high school through college. She organized donations of supplies for first time, college-bound students in Cleveland and Chicago. In Detroit, she designed and oversaw the implementation of a city-wide school volunteer program, the *DPS Volunteer Reading Corps*. During her tenure the school district recruited, vetted and trained over 1000 literacy volunteers to mentor and tutor young learners in Detroit's then 85 elementary schools. Beyond this, Barbara has intervened personally to leverage resources, including her own personal funds, to support numerous individual students and their families in times of crisis.

Finally, Barbara's belief in and advocacy for economically disadvantaged children has always been grounded in the fact that she sees herself reflected in the students she has been charged to serve. She has always understood that schools can and must make difference for their students. This sense of urgency and personal commitment has continuously been at the heart of her work wherever and in whatever leadership capacity she served. Simply put, Barbara is a visionary servant leader whose selfless work on behalf of poor children in underserved, under-resourced school communities has been and continues to be her true legacy.

On a personal note, Your Honor, please know that there were many times during our 30-plus years' journey when Barbara believed in me more than I believed in myself! She has been an extraordinary friend, teacher, mentor, role-model and sister to me. I know that where I arrived professionally is in large part due to the leadership challenges she put before me and to her unwavering support and skillful guidance of my work. I also know she is a devoted daughter, sister, wife, mother and grandmother. Family is the core of her existence and she is the heart of her loving extended family. Her Sunday dinner gatherings are well-known at her home in Cleveland, but they were also the source of familial and emotional support to those of us who traveled and served with her over the years. Despite the professional demands of her office and her own personal obligations, Barbara has always made time to listen and be present for anyone, adult or child, who reached out to her. Most of all, Judge Chang, I know that Barbara lives by her belief that we are put here on earth to do good for others. This is the mantra that guides her. This is the Barbara Byrd-Bennett I know.

Again, I respectfully thank you for taking the time to read and consider my comments.

Sincerely yours,

*Leaura N. Materassi-Eaton*

Leaura N. Materassi-Eaton

Marilyn R. Reid  
Retired: Director of Arts NYC Dept. of Education  


February 17, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
North District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Re: Character reference for Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Dear Judge Chang,

This letter is being written on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. Having known Barbara for several decades, I was taken aback when I heard of the charges filed against her. We first met when she became the superintendent of Community School District 17, Brooklyn, New York. The school district was in crisis. I was a teacher, administrator and supervisor in Community School District 17 and worked under more than fifteen (15) superintendents in my first 26 years of service.

Barbara's commitment to the children and her open and transparent leadership style stabilized the district and led to improvements in the education of the students. While there she worked tirelessly with parents, staff and the UFT to improve the community as a whole. She and I became fast friends during her tenure as Superintendent of Community School District 17. This entire incident seems out of character for someone as dedicated and community-minded as Barbara.

During and beyond that period, we supported each other's careers, attended each other's most intimate family celebrations, and volunteered for several community-based restoration projects. I've witnessed the transformation of an entire district as Barbara demonstrated an undying commitment to diversity, championed underprivileged children, and not to mention, shared an incessant love of family. She is a woman, a human being, who is forever welcome in my home, at my table and as a part on my life.

Though I haven't spoken to Barbara directly with regard to her case, I've been kept abreast by a mutual friend. That said, I am aware that Barbara has admitted to wrongdoing, and I am certain she regrets her involvement.

Please contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marilyn R. Reid". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Marilyn" on the first line and "R. Reid" on the second line.

Marilyn R. Reid

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

August 4, 2016

Honorable Edmund E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
Everett McKinley Dirksen United States Courthouse  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the court; I deem it an honor and a privilege. While this letter does not address a happy occasion, I am filled with a great deal of pride as I feel fortunate to be heard. My name is Marvin Curtis Reid. I was born in East Harlem, raised in the South Bronx and I attended public schools in New York City.

I met Dr. Bennett as a seven year old second grade student in her class; back then, she was merely Ms. Byrd. Through the vast expanse of time I remember virtually everything she said to me, how she looked at me, encouraged me, chastised and corrected me when necessary, but most of all, what she taught me. You might think it strange to have such memories that span well beyond 40 years, but I come before the Court as a living example of the outstanding primary education I received from Dr. Bennett.

I know what Dr. Bennett has been convicted of, but I do not fully understand the law associated with it; therefore, I will not disrespect the Court or the attorneys by attempting to explain her actions or even offer an apology on her behalf. My role is simply to tell you that I love Dr. Bennett with every fiber of my being and I am alive, educated and prosperous because she sacrificed part of her life for me.

The impact she had on me has lasted a lifetime as I too became a teacher and school administrator. I've traveled the world as an Aerospace Specialist with NASA and served as a State Education Administrator. I am the author of several books, an Imdb recognized screenwriter and now the owner of my own film production company, and a loving husband and proud father.

In nearly 32 years as an educator, I was very fortunate to serve my community and inspire countless numbers of young people, many of whom I call friends today. They are doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, school principals and other school administrators, police officers,

firefighters, members of our military, engineers, actuaries, construction workers, members of the clergy, and other fields. They are who, what and where they are because at one point in their development, they encountered Mr. Reid, who learned from Dr. Bennett.

That said, there are literally thousands of people, at this very moment, saving lives, inspiring others, and doing great things for this country because of some small impact I had on them. Allow that to sink in for a moment; thousands of lives positively impacting thousands more because of the efforts of two people.

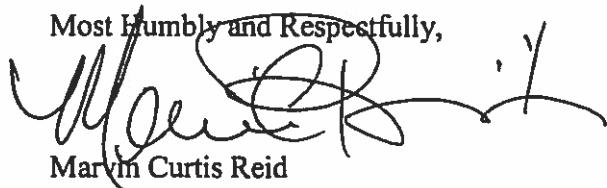
On behalf of my wife, our children and the thousands of students I taught and the dozens of teachers I supervised in New York City, Washington, DC, Maryland, Oklahoma and around the world, I humbly beg the Court for leniency for Dr. Bennett. I know Dr. Bennett still has a great deal of value to offer our society.

I have no fancy quote or pithy saying to conclude my comments; all I have is my plea, my *gratitude for this opportunity, and my life to present to this Court as a living testimony to the positive impact Dr. Bennett has had in education...and beyond.*

My prayers are with counsel, this Court, and your City.

Thank you.

Most Humbly and Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marvin C. Reid".

Marvin Curtis Reid

[REDACTED]  
February 2, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

I feel compelled to submit this letter to attest to the character and integrity of an outstanding educator and leader Mrs. Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I met her in 1994 when she was selected by the then Chancellor, Ramon Cortines, to reform a fledgling school district in Brooklyn, New York. The district was rife with fiscal mismanagement, declining educational success and unassigned permanent administrative personnel. I was an Interim Acting Principal in the district when Mrs. Byrd-Bennett was assigned there. In addition, I live in the district and my children attended school there.

My admiration and respect for Mrs. Byrd-Bennett grew as I observed the tenacity and strength which she demonstrated as she worked to accomplish the goals set forth for her by the Chancellor and her personal goals.

The parents, students and staff eagerly awaited a positive change to occur under her leadership. Although she sometimes faced resistance from the old guard, she continued to persevere and in less than three years she achieved her goals: fiscal accountability, improved educational outcomes, assignment of permanent school administrators and unifying a once divided school community. As a result of her success, the new chancellor Dr. Rudolph Crew, appointed her to head a newly created district (The Chancellor's District) which was comprised of failing schools across the five boroughs of New York City.

Mrs. Byrd-Bennet's success was due to her commitment to the students and families that she served and to the professional and personal development of the staff who delivered the services. She built a sense of community among all the players, listened to our needs and provided support when and where needed. In return she expected the same level of commitment from her subordinates. She instituted a professional Development Lab where school personnel attended to hone their skills. She visited schools regularly, announced and unannounced making it necessary for principals to be prepared at all times. She created and expanded programs for non-English speaking students, students with special needs and newly arrived English speakers with various dialects. She accomplished this through partnerships with elected officials and community based organizations. She also included parents in all aspects of their children's education.

In conclusion, I think that Mrs. Byrd-Bennett's greatest attribute was the compassion, caring and concern that she showed for students, parents and staff. Let me cite three examples:

- 1) On a visit to a middle school in a troubled section of the district, to discuss student attendance among other issues, she was told of a chronic absentee who lived in the nearby housing project. She went into the projects, found the young man and was told that he needed sneakers, she provided those sneakers.
- 2) A middle school student choked on an orange and unfortunately passed away. Mrs. Byrd-Bennett paid the funeral expenses from a fund she established and from personal funds.
- 3) A feud was brewing between a parent organization and the building Principal. Mrs. Byrd-Bennett met with the parties separately to hear their grievances. She then met with them jointly and diffused what was potentially a volatile situation. The parties were able to have a positive working relationship throughout the school year. These examples are just three among a myriad of others, but I hope that they show the character, integrity and dedication of Mrs. Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Sincerely,

*Yvonne Reid*  
Yvonne Reid

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

January 12, 2017

Honorable Edmund E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Honorable Judge Chang:

This letter is written by the Spann Family. We have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett since she was simply Ms. Barbara Byrd-a wonderfully dynamic teacher in Public School 30 (PS30) in East Harlem back in the early 1970's. Over the years we continued to see her occasionally at events for people who at one time or another either worked at PS30 or in Manhattan's School District 5 where we attended schools. We came to know Ms. Byrd at a time when teachers, administrators, and families knew each other and maintained relationships because there was an understanding of the benefit children would experience if they knew that their teachers really knew parents and kept an open dialog with them. As a result of that type of school and familial relationship our family developed and maintained a deep respect for the people like Ms. Byrd. That respect was nurtured from getting to know her as a teacher that demanded excellence and supported her students' achievement of it, as well as associating with her as a parent whose own child attended the school where she taught because she believed in the quality of the whole school and the school's community. We remember times when Ms. Byrd and those she worked with would be at the school at the end of the day but the teachers would still be there providing extra help to students and opportunities for parents and pupils alike to volunteer in a variety of ways that would help better the school.

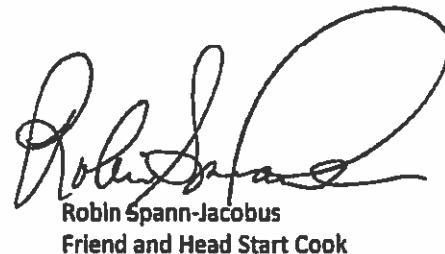
We asked if we could write a letter of support for Barbara Byrd-Bennett because we only know the good in her. We asked to write a letter of support because we equate our love for education, family and community development to our association with Ms. Byrd, her family and the people she worked with. In our family there are a number of us employed in a variety of positions connected to education and community development. As a result of the way we learned years ago, we give significant credit for who we are and what we do to the role models we had as youngsters-and Ms. Byrd is definitely one of those role models.

We are more than willing to speak further on why we love Barbara Byrd-Bennett and would support any clemency that can be afforded her because she has actually had a very positive influence on those that she has served the communities she has worked for and we would like to support in any way we can.

Humbly and Respectfully Submitted by,

  
Diane Spann, Executive Director  
Addie Mae Collins Community Service

  
Dorothy Spann, Former Parent &  
Retired Parent Coordinator, PS 30M

  
Robin Spann-Jacobus  
Friend and Head Start Cook

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor:

My name is Stacey Spann-Thom. I am writing this letter to the court to express the impact Barbara Byrd-Bennet has had on my life.

I met Barbara (Mrs. Byrd) in the 1970's while attending Elementary Community School 30, located in East Harlem. I am the third child of eight, all of whom attended the same elementary school, but only four of us had the pleasure of attending the school during her teaching years. Mrs. Byrd was one of my favorite teachers for many reasons, which admittedly were unknown to me in my youth but were revealed during my early adult years as I chose my career path and how I wanted others to view me.

Yes, as I stated at the beginning of this letter, my name is Stacey Spann-Thom, but that is not who I am. Based on the being born and raised in Harlem in the 60's to a single parent, who would go on to have five more children, the odds of my success were slim to none. However, I was the product of a very strong, determined, loving, encouraging and caring mother. So I was always seeking role models who possessed some of the same characteristics, some of which I noticed in Mrs. Byrd. As a result of having positive influences and mentors in my life, I've always looked to pay it forward by having a positive impact on others, old and young.

Today, I am a nearly 50-year old woman, with a 30- year successful career in the NYC Department of Education with the NYC School Construction Authority, happily married, homeowner in Upstate, NY. When I look back on my life, the good, the bad, and ugly there are key people who I recognized as having a significant effect on my path in life and Barbara is one of those people.

I can say with some certainty that without having positive influences like Barbara in my life during my development years I would not be the person I am or have the successes that I have achieved to date.

I'm aware and understand that Mrs. Byrd has admitted and acknowledged her actions with regard to this case. As with all of our decisions and actions, there are consequences. Having said that, I would humbly request the court to consider all of her actions during her entire career not just those which brought her before the court. She has been a dedicated civil servant to the Education field as long as I have known her. As she continued to pursue her career in the education field she put forth just as much dedication to raising a loving and successful family. In closing, I would ask that you consider the positive impact she has had on my life.

Sincerely,

*Stacey Spann-Thom*

**Silberman**  
School of Social Work

**HUNTER**

February 4, 2017

**Honorable Edmond E. Chang**  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

I write this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd Bennett who I first met in the mid 1990's when she was the superintendent for Community School District 17 in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn NY.

Barbara was one of 17 community school district superintendents that I had the pleasure of spending time with monthly at a breakfast meeting. The superintendents came together to share strategies for ensuring the best possible outcomes for students, faculty, administrators, and staff. They also built a collaborative spirit of sharing so that they could work with their elected community school boards to achieve the best educational outcomes for their districts.

This kind of sharing and collaboration was unprecedented in the NYC public school system. The 17 superintendents were all black and brown people and in New York City's superintendent role, there were no second chances. The community school boards were exacting in the expectations held for the districts and elected people who were citizen policy makers populated the boards. Barbara Byrd Bennett was appointed superintendent for District 17 after the superintendent was removed. The fact that this happened speaks to the high esteem Ms. Byrd-Bennett had garnered during her tenure as schoolteacher, school administrator, and results oriented educator who was comfortable with students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators, peers, and people on the streets.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett is a systems change agent. When Ms. Byrd-Bennett was CEO of Cleveland Municipal School District she and her trusted deputy, Myrna Elliott Lewis, visited Israel to study the school system there. What they saw had a profound impact on them. They saw how systems/institutions learn; institutions learn through the people who work in them. Barbara and Myrna came back to the United States convinced that helping the school system learn, as an institution was essential. How can schools be about the business of educating children and not attend to the growth and development of the administrators who are responsible for making bureaucracies work?

# Silberman School of Social Work

## HUNTER

Ms. Bennett organized the top administrators in the Municipal School District into one large book club. The team chose books to read for the entire school year and once a month they met in executive retreats for one and half days to talk about the big lessons from the books and how those lessons were applicable to the work that they were doing in Cleveland. Barbara's leadership approach was to articulate a vision statement with six strategic focal points that helped set the district's course as well as directed each team member's work. What truly elevated her efforts, however, was the system of long-term learning and leadership she and Elliott-Lewis began and hoped would continue after they were no longer in the district.

For three years, the executive team met monthly to discuss books, their work, and to build relationships. This team of educators/administrators was a mix of young and not so young, Ohioans and non-Ohioans, racial, ethnic, gender, and religiously diverse, yet over time they became a highly innovative team who could generate amazing results. Their capacity to be so amazingly innovative was in large part due to the ease in their communication. They could debate ideas and work through conflict and breakdowns because they kept children at the center of their work and because they had spent the time to get to know each other in those weekend retreats.

Ms. Byrd-Bennett got the job done in the chancellor's district in New York City, she was productive as an executive in Cleveland, and she excelled as a developer of staff, teachers, and students. What is most remarkable for me about this gifted leader is that she gave equal attention to ensuring that the people who were in her circle of influence practiced self-care. She took Covey's lessons of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People seriously and incorporated the principles into her management style. Ms. Bennett took the time to hone her craft by staying on top of the broad literature informing the disciplines critical for the success of schools serving low-income, black and brown children living in resource challenged communities. The arts were always close to Ms. Byrd-Bennett's heart and she recognized that the brain developed through exposure to multiple stimuli that exceeded what was possible through "chalk and talk".

I'm an associate professor at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College in New York City. Barbara Byrd-Bennett is a highly respected colleague featured in a book that I wrote with co-author, Steve Burghardt. The book title is *Stories of Transformative Leadership in the Human Services*. Ms. Byrd-Bennett's work is featured in the book because her contributions in educational leadership are instructive.

We wrote *Stories of Transformative Leadership* for people starting out as leaders in the human services. These leaders can read Jack Welch whose corporate resources made it possible for managers under his

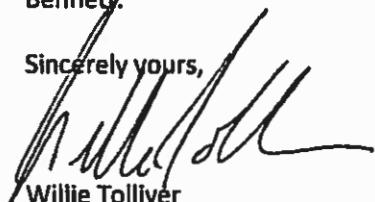
**Silberman**  
School of Social Work

**HUNTER**

tutelage to have their managerial assignments changed every 30 days, and then spend golf weekends in Bermuda to discuss the lessons they learned on their assignments. Barbara Byrd Bennett generated strategies to develop the next generations of education leaders and her work is making contributions across this great nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the court on behalf of my colleague and friend, Barbara Byrd Bennett.

Sincerely yours,



Willie Tolliver  
Associate Professor  
Silberman School of Social Work  
Hunter College & The City University Graduate Center  
City University of New York

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United State District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd Bennett. I have known Barbara, (affectionately referred to as B3), for over 10 years. I came to know her as she was hired as CEO and Superintendent of schools in Cleveland, Ohio. During that time, I was an anchor for WJW, the FOX News affiliate in Cleveland. As I got to know her, I grew to admire her for courage and grace under pressure. She was subjected to intense scrutiny during her time in Cleveland. Over the years I have watched B3 conduct herself with grace and dignity. During my tenure as a reporter, I was often touched by Barbara's compassion and concern for the children of Cleveland schools. I sent her a note of encouragement. Many years later at family gathering at her home, Barbara pulled out the note and we re-read it together. We shared a tear filled moment.

A few years after having covered B3 in the local news media, I met her daughter Nailah Byrd Suggs at a community fundraising event. We quickly became good friends. Nailah and her husband introduced me and my husband. Thus, our family has shared many holidays, weekends, and vacations with the B3. My family and I are frequent guests at her home. I have witnessed B3's endless devotion to family and those she loves. She is a loving wife, mother and grandmother of twin boys (Jalen and Khalil). She loves hard and always puts family first. Her home environment is a clear reflection of that love. We have gathered with her on many occasions. We have always looked forward to celebrating and/or gathering in such a loving, welcoming atmosphere. I have seen firsthand how attentive, kind and caring B3 is with her husband, children, and grandchildren. I have watched her engage with friends and family in a loving, caring manner. Gathering at her home is always a time for family to connect, share and creating lasting memories. Many of my fondest memories are at B3's home with children running around, adults laughing and socializing with one another.

Barbara and her daughter Nailah have a very close relationship. They talk and text with one another on a daily basis. I can certainly identify as I have the same rapport with my two sisters. B3's absence will be felt by her family. They will miss her terribly. As a grandmother, Barbara will miss out on many monumental events in the lives of her grandchildren.(Proms, graduations, etc) She has always served as the matriarch of the family and an integral part of their lives. She will be unable to assist her daughter in navigating the waters of raising two teenage boys. Her absence will be difficult for her entire family but it will be felt most by her grandchildren.

While Barbara's family and friends certainly recognize that she has taken responsibility for her actions, we hope that the courts would take Barbara's family life into consideration prior to sentencing. As Barbara is a loving wife, mother and grandmother, we would ask that the courts show Barbara leniency. We ask that the courts consider Barbara's strong familial relationships, age, and influence within her family and among her friends.

Thank you

Stacey Bell-Lynn

January 26, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am honored to provide this letter of support for Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I first met Ms. Byrd-Bennett around 2003 when she was CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District, and we remain close friends and professional colleagues to this day.

Until my resignation earlier this month to pursue other opportunities, I served for more than 16 years in a variety of capacities – from program officer to senior vice president to founding president of a subsidiary -- at the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, a Cincinnati-based private charity whose mission is to fund, develop and implement strategies to ensure that every young person experiences a high-quality education.

At the very top of my list of lessons learned through many years in education reform is the critical importance of great leadership. And having worked with dozens of education reformers, district CEO's and superintendents, and various other leaders, there is no leader I respect or admire more than Ms. Byrd-Bennett. At every level of the education system, she has been an extraordinary role model, visionary, collaborator, innovator, and – most importantly – uncompromising champion for all children.

My work with Ms. Byrd-Bennett has focused on two areas. First, around 2005, KnowledgeWorks and three other Ohio-based charitable foundations formed a coalition of superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's eight largest urban school districts – aptly named the Ohio 8 Coalition – to learn from each other and to advocate for policies that would support their mission. It was clear from the outset of our first meeting that Ms. Byrd-Bennett was looked to by her colleagues for leadership and vision. Unsurprisingly, they elected her to be the Coalition's first co-chairperson (along with a teacher's union colleague). Clearly, Ms. Byrd-Bennett was a leader among leaders.

Over the next few years under Ms. Byrd-Bennett leadership (I served as the funder's representative and occasional facilitator), the Ohio 8 Coalition was a dynamic, influential force in Ohio, and became the clear voice and conscience of urban education in the state. Sadly, after Ms. Byrd-Bennett's leadership term ended and later following her move to Washington, D.C., the Coalition lost its

verve, stature, and was never quite the same organization. My observation was that Ms. Byrd-Bennett's ability to "rally the troops" around the critical issues of the day was both compelling and inspiring, and her departure left a void which has never been filled to the level it was in the Ohio 8's heyday.

The second and far more significant capacity in which I have worked closely with Ms. Byrd Bennett was in high school reform in Cleveland and Detroit. When I launched the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative in 2003 in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, my goal was to work with all of the state's urban school districts to fundamentally transform their largest, lowest-performing comprehensive high schools into smaller, more rigorous learning environments. Because of the extremely difficult nature of the work as we had designed it, I knew I would need the state's highest profile urban education leaders to sign on. After a couple of meetings with Ms. Byrd-Bennett (who was Cleveland Schools' CEO at the time) she became convinced that our work together would clearly further her vision for her district and was among the first to sign on to the initiative. Not surprisingly, others around the state soon followed her lead. Over the next several years, through numerous progress update meetings, site visits, etc., I learned far more from Ms. Byrd-Bennett than we could ever have hoped or anticipated. Frankly, my staff was in awe of her and what she was accomplishing in Cleveland.

It was through that collaboration that I came to appreciate the extraordinary leadership ability of Ms. Byrd-Bennett. She inspired all of her colleagues and collaborators with an awesome vision – that every child in the district would achieve success and reach his/her potential. She held everyone accountable for their role in pursuit of that vision. As I recall, every major organization in the city was lined up to partner with Ms. Byrd-Bennett and the district, since they knew that she was totally focused on building a better community for everyone, especially young people.

After I formed EDWorks, a subsidiary of KnowledgeWorks Foundation, to continue our work on a fee-for-service basis, Ms. Byrd-Bennett hired us to work with failing high schools in Detroit. We were honored to be chosen, but also recognized the extraordinary challenge ahead of us. For while those schools were in deplorable condition, we also knew that Ms. Byrd-Bennett would never accept excuses or failure, and that she would be unwavering in her insistence that all of Detroit's children deserved a great education. She held us to high standards of accountability and inspired us to do our very best work.

Although we did not have a formal working partnership while Ms. Byrd-Bennett worked in Washington, D.C. and later in Chicago, I continued to reach out to her for advice, counsel and sharing of her vast knowledge and experience in education reform. Despite incredible demands on her time, Ms. Byrd-Bennett was always gracious, helpful, open and creative in helping me think through

challenges as well as opportunities. There is not now nor has there ever been in my career any one whose opinion on education matters I respect more.

And while I am saddened by the current situation facing Ms. Byrd-Bennett, I am perhaps even more saddened by the reality that the field -- so many education reformers, practitioners, and stakeholders (including, first and foremost, the precious children) -- are without the incredible skill, ability, and leadership of Ms. Byrd-Bennett. She still has extraordinary wisdom, talent and so much to give in service to education and young people.

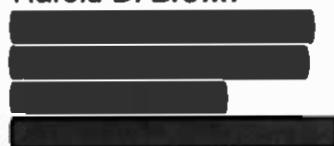
I am humbled and amazed by the grace and forthrightness with which Ms. Byrd-Bennett has faced and continues to face her uncertain future. True to her character, she has not avoided the reality of the situation, but rather has faced it with incredible strength and humility. She has even made time to meet or talk with me in recent months about my work and career. I remain eternally grateful for both the personal friendship and professional partnerships I have been honored to experience with Barbara Byrd-Bennett. She will forever sit atop my list of great educators, great leaders, and great people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my reflections. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Harold D. Brown

  
[REDACTED]

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor,

My name is Eugenia Cash and I am employed at the Cleveland Metropolitan School District as a Humanware Manager/Social Emotional Learning Administrator. I initially met Barbara Byrd Bennett at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in 1998 when she was in the emergency room waiting to be seen by a physician. As the emergency room social worker, it was my role to touch base with everyone and ensure that they were being assisted and supported until they were seen by the physician.

I did not know initially who Barbara Byrd Bennett was and did not find out until after she had exited the area we were in. We had talked about her move to Cleveland, living in the city, shopping, clothes, education and family.

In 1999 I applied and was blessed to secure a job at the Cleveland Metropolitan School District as Supervisor of Community Agencies and served as liaison to the Mayor's office. I had an opportunity to not only see Barbara Byrd Bennett in a meeting but I had an opportunity to speak with her and I reminded her as to when we first met, and she remembered me and laughed because I had talked her ears off, I tease her about it even to this day. I found her to be pleasant, articulate, intelligent and passionate about supporting the children and families of the community she serviced and also lived in.

Between 1999 and 2003, things came together for the Cleveland Schools; the district was pulled out of "academic emergency ", the states lowest designation. Barbara Byrd Bennett was backed and supported by then Mayor (Michael R. White ) who made his concern for the schools crystal clear, and with our savvy, enthusiastic and charismatic school superintendent who drove the long, slow train of academic improvement for over 65,000 mostly impoverished children we made progress.

Barbara Byrd Bennett and her entire staff of administrators worked long, consistent hours above and beyond the initial work day, and she stayed later than anyone. She implemented the school administrators tutorial program where all administrators including herself spent 1 hour per day 2 days per week at a school tutoring a student, never had this occurred before.

Here is a snapshot of some of her accomplishments:

- Increased immunization rate from 60% to 92% in a 2 year period.
- Created the school district's Comprehensive Health Plan with the support of school and community partners and parents.
- Partnered with Case Western Reserve University for the childhood obesity program as well as the open airways program for students with asthma.

- The responsible Sexual Behavior Program was launched in collaboration with the Health Department Mental Health in Schools program which is currently in place today and ensures every Cleveland School has a mental health intervention specialist in their building
- Partnered with Helen Keller Worldwide , coined the one stop shop for students to get their eyes checked and pick up glasses 3 weeks later all in school building
- Dental sealant - program where dental students come from Case Western University Dental School to clean and inspect the student's teeth.
- Project LINC, (Let Interactions Never Cease) in collaboration with the Department of Children and Family Services ensures open communication and dialogue between the school system and the Department of Children and Family Services regarding student's attendance, behaviors, and safety.

The foundational piece was laid with Barbara Byrd-Bennett, with her strength and tenacity the Cleveland Metropolitan School district made strides. Barbara Byrd Bennett was also a mentor to many including myself and always stressed you to do your best and continue to absorb professional development because we can always learn something new and enhance our skill set to help others. The best is expected as it should be for educators to give.

All the students, families, community providers, partners and professionals that she has mentored, tutored, motivated, and strengthened to do this work, set us on a path of educational excellence and equipped us with the tools to achieve and give our best. I respect and acknowledge that she made a bad judgment, but for all the good that she has done and all the seeds of educational excellence she has sown and planted even in me, I still love, value and respect her. She will never plant the seeds for others in that manner again and the loss is to the students, community and herself.

I appreciate and thank you for reviewing my letter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eugenia Cash".

Eugenia Cash LSW, MSSA



Inajo Davis Chappell  
Partner



February 14, 2017

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604-1702

Re: Character Letter in Support of Barbara Byrd-Bennett Ahead of Sentencing

Dear Judge Chang:

My name is Inajo Davis Chappell. I am an attorney in Cleveland, Ohio and a partner at Ulmer & Berne LLP. I chair my firm's Nonprofit Practice Group, which includes School Law and Public Law practice areas.

From 1991-1996, I worked as an attorney in the Law Department at the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD). Thereafter, I handled legal matters for CMSD at my current firm as outside counsel before and after Barbara Byrd-Bennett came on board as CEO. I met Barbara shortly after she took the helm of CMSD in 1998 and began working with her in my role as legal counsel. I have known Barbara now for about eighteen years. She is my friend and I have tremendous respect for the life-changing work she has performed over so many years that has richly benefited students and families in Cleveland's urban core.

During Barbara's tenure at CMSD, I was able to observe her work with the students, teachers and administrators at CMSD first hand. Her genuine passion and love for the children in the school district was obvious. Barbara's concern and caring for "her kids" – as she called them – and her earnest desire for them to learn and achieve is best illustrated by her response to stories from parents and students about their need and struggle.

CLEVELAND  
COLUMBUS  
CINCINNATI  
CHICAGO  
BOCA RATON

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ULMER.COM

Barbara often shared that, because she was deeply impacted by the deaths of so many CMSD children and their family members, she felt an obligation to help and contribute to the funeral costs. She also personally responded to many other requests for assistance. Those requests were wide ranging, but some related to the inability of a student to participating in some enrichment or academic activity. For example, parents would report that an electric bill could not be paid so that a child could not do homework in the evening; or that a musically gifted child needed an instrument to practice at home because school district policy prevented instruments to travel home with children (unless the school received a deposit, which most families could not afford). Some CMSD children were without appropriate attire for a job interview and every year many CMSD alumni needed the start-up supplies and materials to attend freshman year at college. Barbara routinely would respond with giving her own funds to help students in need.





February 14, 2017

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One of the reasons Barbara and I became friends was because I discovered the kind and compassionate person she is, and I witnessed her great spirit of generosity and love for "her kids" frequently demonstrated by her outreach to students and families. Barbara was so moved by the stories of difficult circumstances and financial barriers to student enrichment and achievement; she was inspired to form a nonprofit to assist with removing these barriers.

In 2003, Barbara formed the Barbara Byrd Bennett Foundation for Cleveland's Children (the "BBB Foundation"), which was created to provide financial assistance or "gap funding" to CMSD students. That funding often enabled a student made the difference with a student's ability to participate in a certain program or activity. The BBB Foundation i) provided "college trunks" by paying for some of the essentials of college-bound students, ii) funded college application fees and trips for children to visit colleges, iii) paid for boots, gloves, books, and other items in response to requests from families and students.

I was privileged to serve a Board Member and Secretary of the BBB Foundation. I recall how important the work of the BBB Foundation was to Barbara and how impactful those small grants were in changing life trajectories of CMSD students. I was involved in forming the BBB Foundation, securing its tax-exempt status and, as Secretary of the BBB Foundation, keeping records of the gifts made. My file records include a copy of the record of gifts made by the BBB Foundation in 2004, which I have attached to this letter. The attachment illustrates the kinds of gifts made by the BBB Foundation, reflects Barbara's love and care for her students, and demonstrates the positive impact she was able to make in their lives.

In 2006, when Barbara left CMSD, the BBB Foundation was dissolved and, as part of the winding-up of its affairs, the Board authorized distribution of all remaining assets to the Cleveland State University Foundation so that the BBB Foundation's mission of providing programs, services, and funds to create, enhance and/or expand educational opportunities for CMSD students and graduates could continue. Funds from the BBB Foundation transferred to Cleveland State University were also to be used to support scholarships for CMSD children applying to and accepted at CSU.

In the 18 years I have known Barbara, I have only known her to be a self-less, giving, generous person with an incredible work ethic and a deep love of her family and the students and families she has served. She has been a tireless and ardent advocate for children in the urban core, and she has been a fighter for educational and enrichment opportunities for all young people. I know that Barbara has admitted wrongdoing in this case and has accepted full responsibility for her conduct. But I also know that she has lived a life committed to bettering the lives of disadvantaged young people and their families.



February 14, 2017

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If it were not for the decision-makers who crossed my path; those who had the power and authority to change the trajectory of my life and career, who saw my potential (or even recognized some of the good work that I had accomplished) and allowed me some measure of pardon instead of penalty, I do not know where I would be. I believe that their compassion at a critical crossroads permitted me to have a productive life and to be a difference maker in the lives of others. Judge Chang, at this defining moment in Barbara's life I am hoping that you are like the decision-makers on my life's journey who blessed me with a second chance.

I know that Barbara is a fundamentally good person- with an extraordinary giving heart. I truly believe she deserves compassion and I pray you will allow her to have a second chance to continue the good works she has done in all of the communities where she has lived.

As you impose a sentence in this case, I hope you will consider Barbara's work at the BBB Foundation, her motivation for establishing the charitable organization together with the good work she accomplished through it, and that you will temper justice with mercy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to read "Inajo Davis Chappell".

Inajo Davis Chappell

**Gifts Provided by the  
Barbara Byrd-Bennett Foundation for Cleveland's Children  
(January through December 2004)**

1.

**Disbursement Payee:** The Ohio State University on behalf of  
**Disbursement Amount:** [REDACTED]  
**Disbursement Date:** January 8, 2004

is a [REDACTED]

He distinguished himself by earning both a high school diploma and an associate's degree from Cuyahoga Community College upon high school graduation. He was accepted and now attends The Ohio State University where he majors in English.

Through OSU, [REDACTED] had the opportunity to participate in the [REDACTED] – a study abroad program scheduled for Winter 2004. The program cost is \$3,471. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

2.

**(Deceased CMSD Student)**  
**Disbursement Payee:** Riverside Cemetery  
**Disbursement Amount:** [REDACTED]  
**Disbursement Date:** March 29, 2004

[REDACTED] was a [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] died in a fire in his home on February 16, 2004. Two of his siblings were also injured in the fire. Neither his parents nor his guardian could afford to provide [REDACTED] with a headstone for his grave.

Shari Cleveland, the principal of Harvey Rice, advised Barbara Byrd-Bennett of the above need. The Foundation contacted The Casket Store on behalf of [REDACTED] guardian to obtain an estimate for the headstone. The owner of The Casket Store offered to donate a headstone to the family upon hearing the story of death. The owner asked that the Foundation pay the headstone setting fee of [REDACTED]. The setting fee is to be paid to Riverside Cemetery where [REDACTED] is buried.

On March 29, 2004, the Foundation issued check #1005 [REDACTED] payable to Riverside Cemetery; the payment reflects the cost to set headstone.

3.

(Deceased CMSD Student)

Disbursement Payee: Pernell Jones & Sons Funeral Home

Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]

Disbursement Date: April 5, 2004

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was a fifth grade student at O.H. Perry Elementary School until the time of her death. committed suicide on March 23, 2004. The Barbara Byrd-Bennett Foundation for Cleveland's Children has donated [REDACTED] to help with burial expenses and [REDACTED] toward a setting fee for a headstone.

Check #1006 in the amount of [REDACTED] toward these costs was sent to Pernell Jones & Sons Funeral Home.

4.

(Deceased CMSD Student)

Disbursement Payee: Watson's Funeral Home

Disbursement Amount: \$ [REDACTED]

Disbursement Date: May 13, 2004

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was a [REDACTED] until the time of his death. passed away suddenly on May 1, 2004 from a condition known as myocarditis. has two other siblings (6<sup>th</sup> grade and 4<sup>th</sup> grade) who attend District schools. The child's legal guardian, [REDACTED] (grandmother), did not have the funds to cover these expenses. The Foundation donated the above amount to cover all expenses related to the funeral, burial and headstone. Barbara Byrd-Bennett contacted the funeral home and they were unable to reduce the cost.

As such, check #1009 in the amount of \$ [REDACTED] was sent to Watson's Funeral Home.

5.

(Glenville High School Senior)

Disbursement Payee: [REDACTED]

Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]

Disbursement Date: June 4, 2004

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is a [REDACTED] High School Senior who will be graduating this year and going on to attend [REDACTED]. has received several awards and scholarships toward her education. The Foundation has awarded [REDACTED] a scholarship in the amount of [REDACTED] to assist with her college tuition.

Check #1010 in the amount of [REDACTED] to be applied to [REDACTED] tuition bill.

6.

(Deceased CMSD Student)

Disbursement Payee: Chapel of Peace Funeral Home

Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]

Disbursement Date: June 4, 2004

[REDACTED] was a [REDACTED] until the time of his death on May 23, 2004. [REDACTED] drowned while playing at a pond in Lakeview Cemetery with his friends.

Check #1011 in the amount of [REDACTED] was sent to The Chapel of Peace Funeral Home to assist with funeral expenses.

7.

[REDACTED]  
Disbursement Payee: Cincinnati Bass Cellars

Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]

Disbursement Date: June 4, 2004

[REDACTED] is a senior at the [REDACTED] who will be graduating this year and going on to attend the University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. [REDACTED] wrote the Foundation requesting assistance in purchasing a double bass. [REDACTED] currently plays in the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra and has attended Interlochen Arts Camp, Brevard Music Center and takes private lessons from a member of the Cleveland Orchestra. [REDACTED] dream is to someday play in a professional orchestra. He would also like to teach younger students to play the bass. In addition to his musical commitments, [REDACTED] manages to maintain a 3.6 grade point average and has passed all five parts of the Ohio Proficiency Test.

The cost of [REDACTED] is entering is [REDACTED]. John Eby, CMSD Director of Arts Education, has certified that the above cost is reasonable and that the type of instrument purchased is essential for [REDACTED] to succeed in the program. Check #1012 in the amount of \$[REDACTED] was issued to Cincinnati Bass Cellars toward the purchase of a double bass for

8.

**Disbursement Payee: Students and various vendors**

**Disbursement Amount: See Below**

**Disbursement Date: June 18, 2004 and June 29, 2004**

and . are [REDACTED]

They have each been accepted into a summer program at [REDACTED]. The summer program is a four week program where students will enroll and complete two studio courses from the [REDACTED] offerings and will receive three semester units of college credit, and will create work appropriate for their college admissions portfolio.

The expenses related to the program, which includes transportation, tuition and lodging, totals [REDACTED] for all three students. Funds for transportation, lodging and tuition were secured from the School District and another grant fund.

After meeting with the students and their parents, the Foundation has agreed to pay for the costs associated with meals for the month long program and art supplies. The cost for meals total \$ [REDACTED]. The arts supplies total [REDACTED]. Students will be required to provide receipts documenting their meal expenses upon their return.

Check #1013, #1014 and 1015, each in the amount of \$ [REDACTED], were issued to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] on June 18, 2004 for the costs of meals associated with their participation in the program.

Check #1016 in the amount of \$ [REDACTED] was issued to Dodd Camera & Video for art supplies needed for the program. Check #1020 in the amount of [REDACTED] was issued to Utrecht for additional art supplies. Finally, Check #1021 in the amount of [REDACTED] for lab fees associated with the program.

9.

Disbursement Payee: [REDACTED]  
Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]  
Disbursement Date: June 18, 2004

[REDACTED] is a [REDACTED] Senior graduated [REDACTED] in his senior class and going on to attend [REDACTED] this year. Check #1017 in the amount of [REDACTED] was sent to [REDACTED] to assist him with costs related to his education at [REDACTED]

10.

Disbursement Payee: [REDACTED]  
Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]  
Disbursement Date: June 18, 2004

[REDACTED] is a graduate of [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] is the [REDACTED] in his senior class this year and going on to attend [REDACTED] Check #1018 in the amount of [REDACTED] was sent to [REDACTED] to assist him with costs related to his education [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

11.

[REDACTED]  
Disbursement Payee: Piney Woods School  
Disbursement Amount: \$1,965.00  
Disbursement Date: June 18, 2004

[REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] who have been selected to attend the Summer Enrichment Camp at the Piney Woods School in Piney Woods, Mississippi. Founded in 1909 by Laurence Clifton Jones, the school is one of four historically black boarding schools remaining in the United States.

Each summer the school offers a Summer Enrichment Camp where students are offered a wide variety of academic enrichment activities, cultural and recreational activities in a safe and comfortable country setting. This year's camp will be held from July 11-24, 2004.

The Barbara Byrd-Bennett Foundation for Cleveland's Children is providing three scholarships to the children [REDACTED] to cover the cost of tuition and room and board. The Friends of Piney Woods - Cleveland is providing scholarships for three other CMSD students to participate. Each family is responsible for transportation and miscellaneous expenses.

Check #1019 in the amount of [REDACTED] was sent to the Piney Woods School for the tuition, room and board for the three CMSD students participating in the Summer Enrichment Camp.

12.

[REDACTED]  
Disbursement Payee: The Fund  
Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]  
Disbursement Date: August 3, 2004

[REDACTED] is a graduate of [REDACTED] participated in the 2004 Summer Olympics held in Athens, Greece. [REDACTED] held a number of fundraisers to raise money for [REDACTED] to travel to/from and participate in the Olympic Games.

Check #1022 in the amount of [REDACTED] was sent to the Fund to support [REDACTED] participation in the 2004 Olympics.

13.

[REDACTED]  
Disbursement Payee: Horst's Violin Shop  
Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]  
Disbursement Date: November 11, 2004

[REDACTED] is a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was accepted and attending [REDACTED] in Columbus, Ohio. [REDACTED] plays the violin and needed her own instrument to enroll in the music program at A [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

The CMSD Arts program contacted both [REDACTED] college music professor. Both recommended that [REDACTED] music teacher and a local [REDACTED] purchase a violin from Horst's Violin Shop.

[REDACTED] and her mother accompanied CMSD Arts staff to Horst's Violin Shop to select a violin.

Check #1023 in the amount of [REDACTED] was sent to Horst's Violin Shop. The amount represents the purchase price of a violin for [REDACTED].

14.

(CMSD Graduate, Mother of CMSD student and Daughter of CMSD Employee)

Disbursement Payee: Fund @ U.S. Bank

Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]

Disbursement Date: December 16, 2004

[REDACTED] was a 21 year old graduate of the Cleveland Public schools, a mother of a current student and the daughter of [REDACTED], a current employee in the District's Child Nutrition Office. [REDACTED] died suddenly when a gunman robbed Tony's deli in Cleveland's west side. [REDACTED] was in the deli buying formula for her newborn baby at the time the gunman entered the store. [REDACTED] was one of two individuals killed during the robbery. [REDACTED] was shot in the back as she ran from the store. A fund was established at U.S. Bank to help the family pay for funeral expenses.

Check #1027 in the amount of [REDACTED] was made payable to the Fund at U.S. Bank. The check was issued on December 16, 2004.

15.

[REDACTED]  
Disbursement Payee: National Young Leaders Conference

Disbursement Amount: [REDACTED]

Disbursement Date: December 28, 2004

[REDACTED] is currently a [REDACTED]. He is a member of the [REDACTED]. He maintains a [REDACTED] grade point average. [REDACTED] was recently nominated to represent the State of Ohio as a National Scholar to the National Young Leaders Conference in Washington D.C. NYLC is a leadership program for promising high school seniors. NYLC offers a series of six-day leadership sessions. [REDACTED] has been nominated to attend the February 1-6, 2005 session. The total cost for the program is [REDACTED], which includes fees associated with room and attendance for the program.

[REDACTED] mother, [REDACTED], contacted the Foundation to seek financial support to defray the cost of the tuition. [REDACTED] was recently laid off and cannot afford the full cost.

Check #1028 is the amount of \$[REDACTED] was sent to the National Young Leaders Conference as partial payment for [REDACTED] participation in the program.

**David A. Daberkو**

[REDACTED]

January 21, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

This letter is being written to share with the Court highlights of my personal and professional relationship with Dr. Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I am aware that Barbara has admitted wrongdoing to the Court and will be punished. It is hard for me to imagine this fine person engaging in illegal activities, given my history with her, but I do not know the facts. I do know that we had a relationship of trust and mutual respect, and that working together, we were able to help thousands of Cleveland schoolchildren to reach their full potential.

Barbara was CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District from November 1998 through March 2006. During that entire period, I was Chairman and CEO of National City Corporation, a bank holding company that was Cleveland's largest public company at the time. National City was a very civic minded company that worked broadly with many not-for-profit organizations in our markets. The two areas of particular focus for us were education and housing/home ownership. We worked closely with Barbara and her staff on several projects, which I will elaborate on shortly.

Also during Barbara's tenure, I served a three-year term as Chairman of Cleveland Tomorrow, an organization of CEO's from virtually all of Cleveland's largest companies. The goal of this organization was to work through public/private partnerships to make Cleveland a better place to live, work and do business. It was a highly acclaimed model nationally and was instrumental in the rebirth of Cleveland in the 80's after decades of deterioration. Its successes were made into a case study at the Harvard Business School and it was widely emulated by other large cities. It continues today as the Greater Cleveland Partnership.

One of Cleveland Tomorrow's major goals during my tenure was to help to improve the Cleveland Public Schools. The school system had been in a downward cycle for many years and cried out for new, energized leadership. Its leaders had almost no

**David A. Daberkو**



credibility with the public. The dropout rate was incredibly high and it was not producing job ready graduates that our businesses needed. The business community was more than willing to provide funds, mentors and partnerships if strong, capable leadership was put in place. Barbara was hired to take on this daunting challenge and, I believe, performed admirably in the job.

Under Barbara's strong, active leadership, progress was dramatic. Most notable were significant, measurable improvements in test scores, attendance and dropout rates. Student disciplinary issues were reduced and the curriculum broadened. She took on tough problems, communicated plans and results to the community at large and began to restore public confidence in the system.

Right from the start, she met frequently with me and other key members of Cleveland Tomorrow. She carefully laid out her plans and won our cooperation and support. The first major agenda item was passage of a bond issue. She persuaded us to finance the campaign that led to the passage of the first bond issue in many years. Establishment of an oversight process to see that the money was wisely spent was instrumental in that approval.

At roughly the same time, many of Cleveland's major employers were approached to form a partnership with a particular school, starting with each of the city's high schools. *The partnerships took many directions but virtually all were successful in bringing volunteers and resources into the specific school to meet its agreed upon goals.*

My proudest moment of working closely with Barbara was the partnership we created between John F. Kennedy High School (JFK), Cuyahoga Community College (CCC) and National City Bank. Simply put, the Bank needed computer operators and programmers. Cuyahoga Community College had an appropriate training curriculum but the students from the Cleveland schools were not prepared to do the work. Together, we set up a program that was offered to JFK students early in their high school years. They were guaranteed a full time job at the Bank after successful completion of the academic side of the program. Paid summer internships were given to the participants, most of whom were from very poor families. It was, and I am told, still is a great success.

**David A. Daberkو**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

-3-

I have not had much contact with Barbara since she left the Schools in 2006 and I retired from the Bank in 2007. I really value the years we worked together and the experiences we shared. She was passionate about her work and the kids.

Every meeting with her was electric, and I walked away thinking how lucky we were to have her in Cleveland and how lucky I was to have her as a friend. Current travails notwithstanding, she is a person for whom I have great respect and in whom I would put my trust.

Sincerely,



David A. Daberkо

January 30, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

All narratives have a context and, if you will bear with me, I will attempt to explain the parameters of this story. My name is Richard A. DeColibus and I was the President of the Cleveland Teachers Union (CTU) from 1988 to 2004; thus, I was familiar with Barbara Byrd Bennett when she arrived on the scene and through much of her tenure with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (which few refer to as anything except Cleveland Public Schools, [CPS]).

The background of how and why Ms. Bennett arrived to steer CPS is not exciting but necessary to understand the so-called "Big Picture.". The essence of the story begins in December of 1996 when Federal District Judge Robert B. Krupansky essentially declared CPS bankrupt (which they were) and told the State of Ohio to take over and run the system. Deputy State Superintendent Dr. Richard Boyd was named to head the venture (or adventure as it turned out). The practical effect of this order was the school system had three masters: (1) Dr. Richard Boyd, as declared by the Federal District Court (it was in the mix because of long-standing desegregation orders); (2) the elected Board of Education members who, while being officially removed from authority, nonetheless felt as duly elected representatives they were morally involved and had some right to input their opinions; and (3) Cleveland Mayor Michael R. White who was convinced the only salvation for the school system was total Mayoral control (his).

Enter the 1996 contract negotiations between my Union (the CTU) and the three-headed CPS gorgon. Dr. Boyd (who turned out to be a true class act) spearheaded the CPS team and did his best to serve the three contract ratifiers (official and unofficial) who had an interest in the outcome. The state's position was crystal clear: not one extra state nickel goes to CPS, no matter how broke they were. The Board of Education had all kinds of demands, mainly management give-backs, and the Mayor wanted control of the entire system without any checks or balances. Our position was simple: We understood they had nothing to give us but we weren't going to move backwards. It was ultimately resolved without a strike when I stressed to Dr. Boyd the Union can go out on strike (we were organized effectively) but how do we get our people to go back in?

Now the narrative shifts to Mayor Michael R. White; we considered him the devil and certainly no friend of teacher unions in general, nor us in particular. He began a well-crafted political campaign with the state legislature to be named in sole control (mayoral control) of the CPS. We resisted with every legal and public relations tool available to

us, including presenting our case to the Ohio Supreme Court in 1997; we did not prevail and our general impression was we were now legal toast.

The Mayor then named Barbara Byrd Bennett as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). She came with a pretty good background (both teacher and student friendly) but considering she was the choice of the devil-mayor, to say we were skeptical is a fair understatement. Barbara, of course, only knew us by reputation and since her primary sources of information was the Mayor and the CPS management team, she couldn't have been very optimistic about the situation she was walking into.

Life is strange. When you are absolutely, positively sure you're going over the edge of Niagara Falls, sometimes it all works out for the better. We and the administration danced around each other for a while like a mongoose and a cobra but then it, like an arctic morning, slowly dawned on us, and them, we were interested in solving problems, not making impressive public relations statements. Almost all school problems are personnel problems and, as time went on, we solved one after another and while the solutions weren't always great, they were good enough. As is clear from any considered reflection, most of the CEO's time is spent dealing with individuals and organizations external to the system (most of which have definitive ideas about how to solve the system's problems; some realistic, some not) and it was very helpful that Barbara picked Lisa Ruda as her Chief of Staff, a problem-solving individual with a "Let's get it done and move on" attitude.

Personally, the pivot moment in my mind was when Barbara assembled most of the CPS leadership, a whole bunch of external stakeholders, and most of the CTU decision-makers in the Cleveland convention center to talk about the phonics v. whole reader instructional methods of teaching reading. Not having an elementary background, I basically stayed away from the debate which had some really passionate advocates for both theories of teaching reading. Basically, Barbara got up on stage and said the research is now pretty clear: phonics works better when you try to teach reading so we're going to stress phonics in our elementary schools. I was flabbergasted, as was just about my entire Executive Board. A school Superintendent talking about how students learn! An ideological Rubicon was crossed and she was leading the way.

As time went on, it also became clearer Barbara understood, as few Superintendents seem to, almost all school problems are personnel problems (as noted above) and the best solution to personnel problems is better training for the personnel. The CTU's formula (never admitted to) was 10% of the teaching force was so good the best thing you could do is leave them alone; they don't need or want direction. Another 10% were not in the right job and the best thing anyone could do for everyone's good is counsel them out of the profession. However, the other 80% can and would profit from well-designed professional development, and in this the CTU and Barbara were in complete agreement.

Another thing which came into sharp focus was the role of Mayor White. As previously mentioned, any Superintendent spends an inordinate amount of time dealing with organizations who, while well-intentioned, have some really strange ideas about how to

make the public schools perform better. While Barbara was the system's QB, Mayor White was her one-man offensive line, running interference for her and freeing her up to attend to institutional and instructional matters. Our opinion of him was sharply redefined when it became clear he was a real critical fulcrum and part of reason the system functioned as well as it did.

I've worked with five or six Superintendents and while all of them were quite competent, from my point of view Barbara's tenure was the most effective and efficient. Her understanding that schooling is almost entirely personnel intensive and, therefore, if you want better results, you need to address the needs and talents of the individuals who stand in front of students everyday

On a personal note, I have met few people I like as much as Barbara. She's funny, bright as a July sun, and simply good company. I remember one day we were in one-on-one conversation about the teacher evaluation process we were using at the time. We had, at the last contract settlement, created a combined (Union-management) committee to explore a different teacher evaluation process (can't agree on a particular contract issue: Form a committee to get it off the table). The committee eventually settled on a Baltimore-based portfolio process.

My teachers hated it. It was time consuming, involved voluminous record keeping, had no real guidelines or specificity to fall back on, and was subject to endless argumentative decision-making. So, out of the blue as our meeting was ending, Barbara said something along the lines of, "Can we do something about this evaluation system? My principals hate it because it takes up so much of their time." To which I replied, "If your people hate it, and my people hate it, and it doesn't work, why are we using it?" And, that was the end of that evaluation process; other organizations should work so well.

I have no knowledge whatsoever about the specific legal issues involved with Barbara but I can say with no hesitation I never had the slightest whiff of impropriety in any of our dealings. I did not submit this letter for approval or review by Barbara or any of her legal team; it is what I remember.

In any case, if you have any further questions or want some further clarification of anything, feel free to contact me at any time or way of convenience to you.

Sincerely,

*Richard A. DeColibus*

Richard A. DeColibus

[REDACTED]

Mrs. Sharon DeColibus  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

October 17, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

Before I start writing my letter regarding my respect and friendship of Barbara Byrd-Bennett, I am aware that she has admitted to wrongdoing. I have known Barbara for 16 years and she has gained my respect as I worked at the Cleveland Teachers Union and she was the superintendent of Cleveland Municipal School District.

Barbara cared for the students and their needs. She put the children first and went out to schools to visit with the students. She also thought that the teachers needed tools in place to do their job, and she worked with the Union to do this. I went to many meetings with Barbara and I saw her passion for the students, the teachers, and the principals. She was concerned about the safety of the students, the learning, and so many needs of the inter-city school students.

Barbara has a great love for her family. She goes out with her grandchildren to their games and roots for them. She has love for her friends and cherishes them and treats them with respect. She has compassion for the neighborhood that she lives in and where she worked when she was with Cleveland Municipal School District. She cared for the teachers and the children. She cared for the principals and the aids and administrative personnel.

Barbara also showed compassion to many people that were in need. She was friendly, honest and trustworthy. She was responsible and reliable in her decisions.

Barbara was and is a friend of mine. I cherish this friendship and hold it as very special that I have a friend as she. Anyone would be honored to have her as a friend.

Sincerely,

*Sharon DeColibus*

Sharon DeColibus

October 19, 2016

Honorable Edmund E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I first met Barbara Byrd-Bennett between 2000 and 2005, a couple of years after she became CEO of Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD). At that time I was working on a consulting contract basis with the Cleveland Initiative for Education (CIE), a Cleveland based organization that supported the professional development of CMSD teachers and principals. My work with CIE was specifically program design and executive coaching for CMSD exemplar principals. Although my direct contact with her was limited during this period; as CEO, Barbara established standards and expected outcomes for our work with her school leaders. She brought a renewed energy, expectations for excellence and a high level of professionalism to the District leadership. I recall also being struck by her deep connection with and compassion for the children. She was most at home in their classrooms where she related easily with her warmth, outgoing manner, and delightful sense of humor.

It should be noted that during a good part of Barbara's tenure, the Cleveland schools were still in the throes of court ordered busing to achieve racial integration, in response to an earlier decision that found the State of Ohio and Cleveland Public Schools guilty of intentionally creating and maintaining a segregated school system. This controversial decision created its own divisiveness and volatility in Cleveland politics, Cleveland business, Cleveland communities – and perhaps most significantly, among parents, teachers and school administrators. In addition, she succeeded approximately 11 superintendents in the 15 years prior to her coming to Cleveland. This context is notable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is how important it was for her to bridge differences and connect with stakeholders at all levels. As an appointee of the Mayor (Michael White), there was a time when Barbara actually functioned as a symbol of hope and equanimity in a city that had been plagued with dissension. In an extraordinarily challenging environment, she approached her position and her work with grace, dignity and an unconditional commitment to the children.

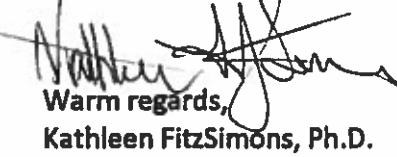
As a lifelong Clevelander, I can attest to the fact that [albeit short-lived] this was a time of hope for the city. Barbara embodied that sense of promise. Her purpose was unequivocal, and her dedication to the children of Cleveland was beyond question. As a

professional woman and colleague, I deeply admire her multitalented ability to create, communicate and put in place a sound plan for academic excellence. As a Caucasian woman who continues to take privilege and place at the table for granted, I have the utmost respect for Barbara as a woman of color who has overcome unimaginable disadvantage to become renowned as an educational leader. And as an executive coach dedicated to healthcare, education and community leadership development, I am wholeheartedly impressed with her vision for leadership.

As a personal friend, I value her compassion and her heartfelt desire to look out for others. – be they family, students or lifelong companions. Earlier this year I had a number of challenging life experiences. These events included a move, a serious illness, a recurrent leg injury, and a tragic accident in which my former husband and father of my children was killed. Despite her own very real heartache, she buoyed my spirits with her compassionate uplifting messages. Barbara reached out and was there for me. She exudes empathy and understands what it is to be vulnerable and alone. That is who Barbara is . . . a person of deep spirituality who intuitively connects with others in an open, caring and heartfelt manner.

I am aware of Barbara's painful and disappointing circumstances, and that she fully owns her part and full responsibility for her actions. Yet, here is a woman who has devoted 40+ years of her life to working with underprivileged children, in hopes of preparing them for a better life. She has relentlessly given of herself and the sad turn of events just feels so completely dissonant. I genuinely believe in her and the goodness of her heart and soul.

Please let me know if I can be of further support.

  
Warm regards,  
Kathleen FitzSimons, Ph.D.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Paul D. Flesher

[REDACTED]

January 13, 2017

Judge Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

My name is Paul Flesher and I worked for Ms. Barbara Byrd-Bennett at the Cleveland Municipal School District from early 2000 until she left the District in early 2006. My title changed during this period of time but essentially I was Chief of Facilities for Ms. Byrd-Bennett.

In the context of the job I held during this period, we prepared and began the implementation of a \$1.5 Billion Master Plan to renovate and or replace 111 school facilities in the District. As part of that program there was a \$53 million program to implement basic "warm, safe and dry" projects to ensure the interim integrity of the buildings until the final disposition of the Master Plan could be implemented. During Ms. Byrd-Bennett and my tenure at the District we started and /or completed approximately \$300 million of these projects.

My purpose of telling you this is not to be a resume of achievements but to have you understand that with this size of a program people wanting jobs or favors or whatever is inevitable. I can state to you that at the start of this program, through the implementation of this program Ms. Byrd-Bennett's communication to me was to ignore any of the "politics" and (I paraphrase) "do what is best for the children of the district and to keep the program moving".

During this period of time we employed many dozens of consultants, Architects, Engineers and /or construction contractors. We followed, with Ms. Byrd-Bennett's support and encouragement, the prescribed state processes for selection and award of all contracts.

Judge Chang  
January 13, 2017  
Page 2

I want to relate one specific incident that demonstrated that support. Since we had little in house construction experience, we employed an owner's representative firm to provide that expertise. The owner's rep would submit for my approval anyone they wanted to add to the project. I would review the qualifications and experience of the person and provide them my approval/disapproval decision. They submitted one person who I felt did not have the correct experience we could use at the phase of the project we were at. It was after that decision that I was contacted by a person who was in a significant political position on why I did not approve the person. I related this incident to Ms. Byrd-Bennett her response to me was "if you don't think the person is qualified, we won't use them and I'll back you up". It was the last time I heard anything about the person.

We also dealt many times with the facility maintenance unions and it was always cordial and a search for common ground on how to make the District more effective.

I cannot speak to the circumstances that led to me needing to write this letter but I can tell you the Barbara Byrd-Bennett I worked for and know only cared about the good of the children she served. I sat in on public meetings, staff meetings small private meetings with different politicians and/or community members and that theme or focus never wavered. Her constant directions to me were to do the right thing and keep the project moving.

The Barbara Byrd-Bennett I know is a caring person, a fair person and a good person.

I could write much more but I understand the need to be brief but please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] if I can assist any further.

Sincerely,



Paul D. Flesher



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20515

MARIA L. FUDGE  
11TH DISTRICT OF OHIO

January 13, 2017

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court, Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Re: Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Dear Judge Chang:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of my friend. It is a blessing to have come to know Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I met Barbara many years ago in a professional capacity, and have been fortunate to call her friend for the last few years.

I admired, from afar, her fierce advocacy for the children of my Congressional District. She was always clear that those who had the least would receive most of her time and attention. Barbara raised the level of expectations for students and raised the bar for what was acceptable from educators. There is no doubt in my mind she gave the best she had.

I will always respect her devotion to family and friends, and her efforts to help those who were lost and left out. Barbara Byrd-Bennett was a force to be reckoned with in my community, not because of her position, but because of her disposition. She was disposed to make the lives of those around her better. She was disposed to give her all to every undertaking, and, most importantly, she was disposed to care about her fellow man.

Certainly, this letter would not be necessary but for a lapse in judgment made by Barbara, which she acknowledged and for which she has taken responsibility. If you look at the sum total of her life, it is obvious that this is an anomaly. Yet actions do have consequences. I am proud that Barbara has taken full responsibility for her actions. However, a bad action does not a bad person make. I know Barbara Byrd-Bennett to be a good person, who, unfortunately, exercised bad judgment.

I ask that you take into consideration all the good she has done; that she has taken responsibility for her actions; and, more importantly, I can attest to the fact that she is a changed woman as a result of this situation. Barbara has slowed down long enough to see the harm she has done to those who love and respect her, and to know we all forgive her and love and respect her still.

Thank you for listening, and I ask for mercy on one who has had a profound and lasting effect on the lives of so many.

Sincerely,

*Marcia L. Fudge*  
Marcia L. Fudge  
Member of Congress

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
February 10, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

**RE: Mrs. Barbara Byrd-Bennett**

Dear Judge Chang:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to step forward to recount my experiences with Mrs. Barbara Byrd-Bennett. While I am keenly aware of her current circumstance I have a positive reflection of the woman and the impact she had on the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD) and my professional and personal development.

I met Mrs. Byrd-Bennett in 1999, at an orientation held at the main Cleveland Public Library with all district principals. At this meeting she outlined her goals, mission statement, objectives, and strategies. "Educating children" was her motto. That would, indeed, be a daunting task. It goes without saying that it was going to require hard work, but it would not be without reward.

Her insatiable love and pure passion of educating children was her driving force - the big picture. Mrs. Byrd-Bennett brought to the table a vision, leadership, creativity, a belief in development and recognition of educational abilities in others and reward of achievement. Her strategies and techniques for attaining the goal of enhancing the educational culture of Cleveland's children were to compile the skills she carried and transfer them into the very souls of her proteges and staff.

As our leader she stimulated those who sat under her tutelage and applied themselves to grow in the art of education. She encouraged, and even demanded, open-mindedness. To that end she provided cutting-edge training and opportunities. As a result these trainings increased the value of the principals, staffs, the education levels, and ultimately the system's children.

Mrs. Byrd-Bennett recognized the accomplishments of her people and was a rewarder of efforts and due diligence. She assigned me as principal to two schools in which she implemented new and award winning initiatives: a K-8 school which was the first in Cleveland; and an early college/high school program in which students achieving a

required grade level would receive credits toward college. I continued to run a CMSD night school that made it possible for students and members of the community who had dropped out of high school to return. Additional awards I received were:

- the Outstanding Foreign Languages Principal in Ohio Award in which Latin, French, Spanish, and German were taught;
- the State School of Promise Award for academic achievement for inner-city schools (received annually); and
- the Harvard Business School of Cleveland Award
- In 2005, I was one of eight in the country to receive a Fulbright Scholarship for State educational accomplishments.

Mrs. Byrd-Bennett was the recipient of numerous awards in her own right. With the receipt of each award she made her proteges and staff members feel that they were a part of that award.

All too often people with gifts of leadership, high-ranking positions, unusually high intellect, executive ability or unique talents feel too important to undertake menial tasks outside of their job title. That cannot be said about Mrs. Byrd-Bennett. She pitched in wherever there was a need. She set the example for others to follow in serving children and worked with parents in the community. She was hands-on. We saw test scores rise and the school culture improved while putting the children first and foremost.

I admired that she chose to reside in the inner-city, less than a mile from her worksite, the Board of Education Building. She wanted to feel the heartbeat of the City and the people she served. Since I was educated in Cleveland schools and was one of her principals I was an advocate for any improvements with intense interest. I watched everything she did and said, and was pleased. In a world in which seeking power, prestige and renown is the priority, Mrs. Byrd-Bennett displayed humble leadership.

I eventually went on to become the Superintendent of the Richmond Heights School District. I credit much of my professional and personal accomplishments to her foresight and willingness to lead the way, am better for having known her, and will forever be grateful.

Most sincerely,

  
Linda T. Hardwick, Ph.D.

October 15, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Honorable Judge Chang,

My name is Karen Herpel and I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for nearly twenty years starting in 1998 on a professional level during my time as a consultant for the Cleveland Initiative for Education. Over time our relationship has evolved and strengthened and I consider her to be a valuable family friend, not only to myself, but to my husband, our children, my mother and other extended family members.

On the evening of March 17, 2003, I received a call from my mother telling me that my father had not returned home. I was almost thirty three at the time and living on my own. Nearly seven months later his remains were found in the Cleveland Metroparks. He had died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

Barbara was one of the first people we called that week in March and she stood by us for the seven agonizing months when we didn't know what had happened-whether my father was alive or dead. She was also one of the first people we called on October 25th when the police notified us that my father's remains had been located. Her unwavering support guided us through a very painful and difficult time.

Although our situation may have been unique, her support of others is not. You may or may not receive letters from all the people's lives she has touched, because many of her acts of kindness have gone without accolades-because she has wanted it that way. I have seen her continue to put others (colleagues, strangers, students, family) first even when it meant sacrifices on her part.

Her long career in education in the New York, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago public school systems serves as a testament to her dedication to improving the lives of children that many in our society have written off. She went the extra mile for hundreds of kids-helping homeless students, assisting kids who wouldn't normally have a chance to go to college, and unfortunately providing comfort to families of students whose funerals she attended. I don't know these stories because Barbara told me I know these stories because others shared them.

I know that Barbara has admitted guilt, but I ask that you consider the totality of her character, her career and the positive impact she has had on countless students and families over the years including ours.

Sincerely,



Karen Herpel

Rosemary Herpel, PhD



Honorable Judge Edmond Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

January 16, 2017

Dear Judge Chang:

Please accept this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett, whom I have known for nineteen years. I realize Dr. Byrd-Bennett has accepted responsibility for her actions; however, these actions do not represent her character. Her work—her love of family—her willingness to give of herself to others, no matter the personal or professional cost, reflect her true character. Her compassion for and commitment to those who have been left behind—forgotten children and families—reflect her life's work. She has dedicated herself to improve the lives of children whom society often rejected. Her continued support of friends and colleagues as they seek her guidance reflects mutual trust and respect for her deep knowledge and understanding of the education profession and its myriad of challenges. She is the core of her family, the center of its fabric and each member looks to her for strength and love. Although my relationship with Barbara began with a professional journey, overtime, we developed a bond of friendship.

I first met Barbara in 1998, when Mayor Michael R. White gained control over the governance of the Cleveland Public School System. He hired her to serve as the District's first Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Cleveland District had been under a Federal Court Order since the early 1970's and between 1983 and 1998 the Cleveland Board of Education hired eleven superintendents to address the abysmal student attendance, the deplorable financial and academic issues, as well as, the low morale of teachers and administrators. It was not until Barbara took the helm that the community saw hope and believed that under her leadership progress could be achieved.

When Barbara became CEO of the Cleveland District, I served as the Executive Director of the Cleveland Initiative for Education (CIE), a non-profit funded by the philanthropic and business communities. CIE's mission was to impact reform in the Cleveland Public Schools. Barbara always believed a strong school leader was essential to create a learning environment where children could succeed. So together, with input from national school leadership experts and District principals and staff, we designed a principal leadership program whose philosophy, structure and implementation led to national recognition and became the basis for our future work in principal leadership.

My professional expertise and my strong commitment to Barbara Byrd-Bennett brought me to Chicago in 2012. Principal leadership was one of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's education priorities, so when Barbara asked me to join her team, I agreed. I served as the Director of Leadership Development in the Office of Human Resources. The implementation and direct oversight of the SUPES Academy was one of my major responsibilities. I collaborated with District principals, administrators, university educators and staff from the Chicago Public Education Fund to ensure input from all and to keep everyone informed. I provide this background so that you will know many individuals participated in the on-going analysis of the program and quality of the leadership development offered by the SUPES academy. I monitored class offerings, conducted evaluations and gathered input from participants and shared these results with internal staff, external partners and the CEO, who provided such to the Board. There was transparency and on-going discussion of how to improve the program to ensure Chicago's principals and administrators received the best possible support.

However, my professional relationship with Barbara is only a portion of our relationship; not the most important part of our history. It is our personal relationship and my profound belief in her integrity that has formed our bond. She is a loving wife, mother, grandmother and friend, demonstrating over a lifetime, her commitment to children, to colleagues, to friends and to her family. She is the center of her family – the core. Each member looks to her for strength, support and love.

For nineteen years, I have witnessed her outreach to provide necessities to those who had little. In both Cleveland and Chicago, she used her own money to help pay for funeral expenses of slain students whose families could not afford to

provide burials. Currently, she helps two young men from Chicago, "adopted grandsons," who were good athletes, but were not encouraged to develop their academic abilities. She made sure they received academic counseling, participated in study tables, graduated and enrolled in college. They call and text her almost daily and she shares in their lives. Recently, she took an interest in a young woman, a waitress where she was dining. Barbara talked with the woman and learned she was a former Cleveland school student. Barbara realized her potential and guided her on a career path. In 2016, the young woman graduated from a community college program and Barbara watched her receive her diploma. Over her lifetime as an educator, Barbara personally helped many young people who did not have caring adults in their lives. She has touched many and continues to do so.

She has supported and mentored colleagues who, even today, turn to her for advice. Many are current school district superintendents. They continue to seek her guidance because she is respected and her knowledge is valued. She is never too busy to listen and take time for others.

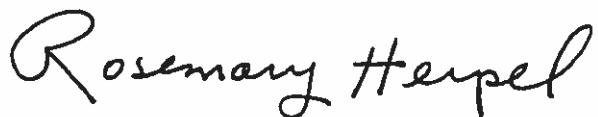
And for me, I can only say Barbara is more than my friend. My family and Barbara's family have spent holidays together, celebrating and sharing in the meaning of breaking bread; we have danced at our daughters' weddings; we have buried our parents; we have rejoiced at the births of our grandchildren; we have sat next to each other at Sunday mass and worshiped together. This relationship developed because at a very difficult time in my life, when we were colleagues in Cleveland, I experienced a great tragedy. Barbara was one of the first to reach out – to offer comfort and assistance – to stand with me. Since 2003, she has been at my side as my friend and confidant. We are family. I know who she is. She has demonstrated time and time again her love, kindness and spirituality.

On April 15, 2015, her life dramatically changed. Another person would have become bitter. Another person would have ceased to assist others who turned to her for professional and personal advice. Another person would have withdrawn. Another person would have lost faith. Another person, but not Barbara. She has accepted full responsibility and tries to remain engaged and productive in her community.

Most recently, she agreed to serve as a sponsor for a disabled woman who wishes to become a Catholic. When our pastor reached out to Barbara, she said yes. Even during her own personal turmoil, she is still willing to serve when asked.

In closing, I ask that you please reflect on her entire life – on the years spent in the service and support of the least among us and on all she has given to her profession, to her students, to her friends and to her family and not judge her solely on one truly unfortunate error in judgement.

Thank You.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Herpel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Rosemary" on the top line and "Herpel" on the bottom line.

Rosemary Herpel, PhD

CAROLE F. HOOVER



January 17, 2017

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor,

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for over twenty years. I developed a relationship with her when she was first named CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. I was both a friend and a major business community supporter.

Barbara's commitment to the delivery of a quality education for the entire student body of the Cleveland District was demonstrated on a daily basis. Her leadership was stellar and was fully supported by both parents and community business leaders alike. Barbara set a very high bar for those who would succeed her as CEO. I found her to be a person who passionately supported her family in Cleveland as well as her parents in New York.

I maintain regular contact with Barbara and I certainly pray for her strength in the months and years ahead. I humbly ask Your Honor that you would consider leniency in your sentencing. Her family and her friends need her. She is a marvelous body of talent and hopefully community service is an option.

Sincerely yours,



CFH: nmt

Honorable Judge Edmond Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

January 18, 2017

Dear Judge Chang:

My name is Nicholas P. Jackson and I am writing this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I first met Mrs. Bennett in 1999 when she attended weekly meetings at City Hall with Mayor White. She had come from New York City to lead the Cleveland Schools. At the time, our interactions were limited. However, in 2001, when she was seeking someone to lead the district non-academic departments, I interviewed with her. I was hired as the Chief Advisor to the CEO. I was prepared to leave City Hall for many reasons but the most important was I had seen the transformation of the city schools system that I had attended and I wanted to be a part of the transformation. I have never regretted that decision.

Mrs. Bennett was fearless, committed and accessible. She started her day at 7:00 AM and I never knew her to leave the office before 8:00 PM. She spent a lot of time each day visiting schools and attending community events.

I was a member of her cabinet. Cabinet meetings were held weekly and gave time for everyone to coordinate their activities and responsibilities to implement Education Cleveland's Children. This was the district long-term transformation plan. At cabinet meetings, members would brainstorm solutions to a proposed problem. Mrs. Bennett would listen carefully and ask many questions. Everyone knew she would always ask one question: How is this good for children and their families?

When the roof at East High School collapsed during the school day, she was at the scene ensuring everyone was safe. She used this potential tragedy to lead a capital levy campaign. Although the levy would raise property taxes for residents, she asked the same question of the community when she announced the need for the levy. How can we use what could have been a tragedy to benefit Cleveland's children and their families? They levy allowed the district to rebuild, remodel and renovate school buildings that were old and in disrepair. The levy passed by an overwhelming majority because of Mrs. Bennett's passion, energy and honesty. She went to every sector of the community to present the reason and the necessity of the levy. She even went to those communities where she knew residents were not supportive.

She used the building project as another way to support students. I sat with her during heated negotiations with the building trade unions. Because their work would expand with the nearly billion dollars construction projects, she wanted them to create pre-apprenticeship jobs and internships to qualified young high school students. She also wanted the community members who might have had a police record to be given consideration for an opportunity to work in some way on the construction projects. She set a tone of cooperation but she would not allow herself to be bullied. She earned respect and she gave respect.

After the levy passed, she convened the Bond Accountability Commission. I remember one instance when a powerful elected official from a neighboring city was pressuring her to hire a particular company. She stood up to him and would not compromise. It was another instance when she simply did the right thing.

The teachers' union had always been at odds with the district administration but she created trust with the teachers' union, which led to successful contract negotiations and avoided teachers' strike.

When Mrs. Bennett was CEO for Cleveland Public Schools, the poverty level for Cleveland students was over 89% and student attendance was extremely low. Mrs. Bennett said that hungry children cannot think and cannot learn and she knew of a federal program (Universal Meals) that might encourage students to come to school. She directed me to have members of my team investigate further and to work with the federal government agencies for Cleveland schools to participate in the program. We were successful and every student enrolled in the schools had breakfast, lunch and snacks, if they attended the after school programs, at not cost. And she directed me to have members of my team develop a plan to keep schools open as an option for parents during inclement weather when schools were official closed. She said there might be students who needed a warm safe place while their parents were not at home. The students would also have a meal because sometimes the meal at school was their only meal.

On another occasion, she had a team develop a plan to transport children more effectively and cost efficient. We needed to reroute the bus system and this was not readily accepted by the bus drivers or their union. She insisted a change in the routing system was critical for the children to get to school. If students are not in school, they cannot learn. Mrs. Bennett did not micro-manage but she expected her team to get the job done.

I know of times when Mrs. Bennett would meet a parent at a school or in the neighborhood. After she talked with them, she has often personally paid the electric bill for the needy family. She has supported the funeral cost the families who did not have the money and she has purchased socks, gloves, boots and hats for students. She did it quietly so they were not embarrassed and she did not want a lot of people to know what she did.

Mrs. Bennett never asked us to do anything she was not willing to do herself. Once she asked everyone at Central Office to adopt a graduating senior. Our job was to see that the student got the college financial aide forms and their applications for college completed. She encouraged the men on staff to mentor the male students. She organized the staff, the businesses and the churches to contribute items to fill the college trunk with supplies and personal items the students would need.

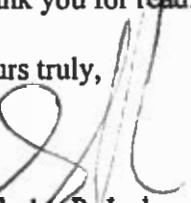
Although I was not part of the academic team, she told us that the operation departments existed to support academics because education was the only way for students in Cleveland to rise from poverty and to be productive members of their communities. She started scholarship funds and she met with students to hear their opinions.

On a personal level, Mrs. Bennett has opened her home to many. I have been there with others from her executive team for Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas dinners and birthday celebrations for her husband, mother and father, daughter and grandsons. We all feel like family at this time and this is when you get to see another side of her. This is when she is cooking, laughing, just relaxing and thanking you for all you do.

Judge Chang, I feel very fortunate to have watched and be part of her commitment to the education of students, be a part of her team and to have her as a life long friend. I know Mrs. Bennett has admitted to wrongdoing. I know she is regretful and I have watched her worry and her pain. I know she is remorseful and I know she can contribute more. So, I ask you to understand and look at her 40 plus years of serving students in some of the most challenging areas of our country, not once regretting her service to them. This is who she is, so I respectfully ask not to judge and punish her based this one horrible mistake. I ask that you find it in your heart and in the law to take all the good she has done and contributed throughout her career as you make your decision.

Thank you for reading my letter.

Yours truly,



Nicholas P. Jackson  
Retired Deputy Chief of Business Operations

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

I hope this letter reaches you Judge Chang in the best of health and circumstances. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I pray that it truly expresses the impact that Dr. Bennett has had on my life. I'm originally from Brooklyn, NY but my family moved to Cleveland, Oh because of our financial circumstances. My family and I moved into The Salvation Army which was a shelter for women and children. My late mother who passed away from cancer would take my siblings and I to feed other homeless people though we ourselves didn't have a place to call our own. At a very young age my mother taught me that true success is not about what you gain but its about what you give. For this reason Dr. Bennett was my definition of success.

From the moment that we met at a board meeting at the high school I was attending my life was forever changed. Dr. Bennett would constantly remind me that if poverty is a jail then education is the only key. If I wanted to break this curse of generational poverty it was imperative that I take this advice to heart and soul. I speak on behalf of thousands of students whose life was changed because of her even though I believe I was her favorite. By inviting me places to speak and tell my story Dr. Bennett made me the face of Cleveland Metropolitan School District. This is what gave me my start as a public speaker. She gave *me the confidence to tell my story which at first I was embarrassed about.*

It was because of Dr. Bennett that I received an award that would lead me to a person who would help my mom get her first house. It was because of Dr. Bennett that I was accepted to Morehouse College. It was because of Dr. Bennett that I received the necessary resources to attend Morehouse College and ultimately graduate with honors. It was because of Dr. Bennett that I came back to Cleveland and ran unsuccessfully for City Council four years ago and this year I'm taking another go at it. If it wasn't for Dr. Bennett the same passion that I have to uplift my community would've been used to destroy it. That was the environment that I was a part of. But Dr. Bennett exposed me to a world that I never knew existed and for that I will be forever grateful. My wife of ten years and three children are also grateful! Who would've known that they would be impacted by how Dr. Bennett took me under her wing. She didn't have to. She didn't have to expose me to a greater world but she did.

Judge Chang I have become aware of the situation and it is unfortunate. Dr. Bennett has positively changed so many lives and I would hate that this become her legacy. I have no idea where I would be if she didn't come into my life. Her presence changed the trajectory of where my family was headed. I'm sure that you can relate Judge Chang having to travel from Taiwan to New York and your family having to make a way. I'm sure you can look back and remember those people who if they weren't there your life would've turned out totally different. Dr. Bennett was that person in my life. I love her dearly and sincerely and her good without a doubt outweighs anything else. Thank you so much for your attention and I pray that this receives the best outcome.

Basheer Jones  
2017 Candidate for Ward 7 Cleveland City Council

*Norma W. Lerner*

January 23, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
U. S. District Court, Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor,

I am submitting this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

I met Barbara when she was in Cleveland working to stabilize Cleveland's School District. I have known her for about 20 years. We quickly formed a friendship and mutual respect for one another.

We worked together on the MBNA Foundation Education Grants which supported results-oriented programs that made significant and positive differences in education. She was very committed to providing quality education for children from all walks of life. Her heart felt compassion and dedication on how to better the lives of children and their families through education was palpable.

She interfaced with the Cleveland community, engaging with the community at multiple levels from the parents and neighborhood people to the corporate and business community.

Barbara was an exemplary CEO during her six-year tenure with Cleveland's School District. During that time the District was removed from both academic and financial emergency.

I recall meeting with Barbara during a time the District faced unprecedented budget reductions. The reduction would have forced the elimination of the District sports teams. She created the standard and policy for every athlete to maintain a grade point average of 2.0 in order to participate. I remember her telling me that the students needed to be scholars first, then athletes. This was something that I very much believed in as well. We were able to grant her request, thus saving athletics from the budget reductions. Cleveland schools went on to win six statewide championships over the next three years.

Having said all this, I honestly believe Barbara is devastated over her grave lapse in judgment. The Barbara I came to know and grow fond of, is a woman of great empathy and devotion.

Respectfully,

*Norma W. Lerner*

President, The Lerner Foundation

Rebecca S. Lowry, Ph.D



October 11, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am submitting this letter to outline my experience as a friend, colleague, and formerly an employee of the Cleveland Municipal School District hired directly by Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I am aware that Barbara has admitted wrongdoing; I wish to convey to the court my views of her character, work ethic, and contributions she has made to helping underprivileged children in particular and to mankind in general throughout the time I have known her.

I knew Barbara first as the CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District over a five year period lasting from August of 2001 to February of 2006. She hired me in 2001 to work as Executive Director of School to Career Programs for the Cleveland City Schools. She actually designed the position specifically with the intent to level the playing field, to guarantee equal access to post secondary job opportunities and /or college entrance for Cleveland's high school students. I recall during my interview how impressed I was at the methodical manner in which she had so carefully crafted the duties of the position: She had extensive data on Cleveland's high school drop out rate which at the time was somewhere around 60-70% and even more significantly, Barbara shared with me the extensive variety of college preparatory programs available to students just outside the city, in Cleveland's suburbs. Barbara had a furious determination to make sure the city students had equal access to the same opportunities; motivation like I had never seen in other leaders. She was deadly honest about the fact that this would not be an easy task. The challenge would be to remove insidious obstacles and to pave pathway (replete with obstacles) toward equal access to an excellent education for ALL. So, in short Barbara hired me and for the next five years, I had professional experiences and opportunities to make a real difference in the lives of students; chances like NEVER before nor SINCE in terms of the magnitude of reward that it was to see minority and "forgotten" children rise to heights of excellence never dreamed possible in Cleveland's history.

Early during my first year working with Barbara I saw her make amazing changes in local attitudes and beliefs about what Cleveland students were capable of achieving. There were

many critics who at times were quite over bearing and (from my view) debilitating. Never did such resistance alter Barbara's determination or stance .....to continue onward and upward to help the underprivileged. A favorite expression that she often used with some of the worst critics was "Please just suspend your disbelief....even for a moment" and I and my staff will show you what Cleveland's students are capable of doing". I will add here that Barbara was extremely honest and generous toward staff. She always gave credit to me and other staff members for the arduous work and long hours of uphill battles that we fought and mostly won! In other words, never did she take credit alone for any accomplishment without acknowledging her team as the most integral part.

Once some of our School to Career / High School to College Preparatory programs got off the ground, Barbara initialized, created, and led the development of many improvements. I will mention one in particular which was the establishment of "The High Tech Academy", a small cohort of students beginning at grade 10 who enrolled in technical courses at Cuyahoga Community College while still in high school, earning college credits, even Associate Degrees, prior to graduation from high school. Gaining the respect and approval from college professors, deans, and even the community at large in terms of a belief that such a novel idea could work was truly one of the most difficult battles fought and won! Barbara believed in what the students could do so much that almost immediately she convinced a prominent local bank to partner with the school district to provide financial backing for the program. Later this program became the poster child for the college's enrollment campaign

Barbara went on to replicate successes attained with The High Tech Academy to a cadre of students at nearby Baldwin Wallace College; a school at the time striving to serve the under privileged. The connections formed here led to the revival of many school-business partnerships existing only in the remote memories of a very few in the City of Cleveland. It was during my five year tenure in Cleveland with Barbara as CEO that I saw what I truly believe was her most vital contribution to humanity. This was very simply her remarkable ability to mentor and motivate so many administrators, teachers and staff to step up to the plate and set aside other priorities in order to pave the way for Cleveland students to excel. This meant contributions of unpaid time far beyond any recognizable work day, commitments to summer bridge programs for students to propel them onward to the next grade level, and the establishment of sports and extra-curricular programs that were NEVER thought to flourish in Cleveland.

It was most notable that through the business partnerships, new life was breathed into each and every school. Businesses did far more than simply write checks for pizzas parties, CEOs granted permission for employees to commit to year long weekly tutoring of students! Paid internships were arranged during the summers for high school students – some of which led later to permanent positions and high school students were invited to shadow medical staff at major hospitals in order to influence decisions to enter the medical field.

I must mention, as well, that in addition to the grand scale changes like the establishment of a Multi-Cultural Center within the City of Cleveland where intake of refugee / immigrant families were received and processed for housing, jobs, and educational services; Barbara responded frequently to individual needs. There were several occasions over five years that I actually saw her pull out her personal checkbook and write checks to the electric company or to the grocery store and hand the money to families on the spot to help remedy a crises situation.

So, in summary Barbara had tremendous foresight to acknowledge that it was the responsibility of all educators to boldly step forward and do whatever was necessary to stop the steady progression of minority children across the bridge to poverty and a future of nothingness. Numerous lives were improved in Cleveland due to Barbara Byrd Bennett's dedication, commitment and determination to show the world that these children were equally deserving and overwhelmingly competent. I am personally proud to have been a part of these uplifting changes and recognitions long deserved.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide this letter.

Sincerely,

*Rebecca S. Lowry*  
Rebecca S. Lowry, Ph.D

Date: 10-11-2016

# AM&A

Alex Machaskee & Associates, LLC  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

February 3, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

As the publisher, president and chief executive officer of The Plain Dealer, Ohio's largest newspaper, before retiring 11 years ago, I have had the opportunity to observe the values, character traits and talent of many people in many professions. I am therefore writing on behalf of Dr. Barbara Byrd-Bennett, whom I knew very well professionally and personally when she was CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District, beginning in 1998. I have lived in Cleveland for nearly 60 years, worked in the media business for over 50 years observing the Cleveland Municipal School District and believe that I am qualified to attest to the leadership, values, compassion for children and the moral integrity of Barbara Bennett.

When Barbara came to Cleveland from New York, where she served as Superintendent in three New York City school districts, to serve in a new mayoral governance system, she spent the first few months visiting schools, meeting with parents and students and engaging the community. She was, as a result, in the media spotlight and her leadership, virtues and integrity of purpose became very evident.

Barbara recognized the importance of building community trust in a failing school system. To that end, she partnered with The Plain Dealer to highlight the challenges and achievements within the school district offering transparency of her work to the general public.

Barbara worked tirelessly to pass the school district's capital levy campaign which led to the construction of more than 40 new school buildings and numerous repairs to other buildings in the school district. On several occasions, in private meetings with me, Barbara would convey her deep personal devotion to the success of her students and the need for a positive environment to teach and learn.

A "No Mission Impossible" was the headline in The Plain Dealer that depicted the attitude describing Barbara's drive to pull the school district out of financial exigency and balance the budget and within three years achieve a 70% improvement across all academic state measures.

Barbara worked closely with civic, religious, business and philanthropic communities and earned their respect for her devotion to the well-being of "her" students while fostering a climate where they would feel safe pursuing their education.

We all make mistakes in life. We fall down, we repent, we fall down again sometimes and we arise again repentant and wiser. Barbara has too much to offer society to be denied the opportunity to use her talent, driven by a good heart and soul, to the betterment of society.

I respectfully thank you for your consideration of constructive rehabilitation for Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Sincerely,



Alex Machaskee  
Retired Publisher  
The Plain Dealer

02/01/2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Good Afternoon Judge Chang,

My name is Lisa Mayti and my family has known Barbara Byrd-Bennett personally for over 12 years. I first became acquainted with Mrs. Byrd-Bennett when she was the superintendent of Cleveland Metropolitan School District when my two older children were elementary school students. I was very impressed with her commitment to education, facilitating the needed changes to a failing system, her ability to listen, and her warmth towards a city that was fed up and looking for someone to blame. As fate would have it I later become personal friends with her, her immediate and extended family as her daughters neighbor.

Over the years Mrs. Byrd-Bennett has become many things to me and my family. She has been a mentor, a mother, a coach, a grandmother to my children, a friend to my mother, and an inspiration. She is the most loyal human being I have ever known. She has ensured that her life long friends and colleagues that she has developed relationships with throughout her life span have been gainfully employed and able to support their families even when employers counted them out based on their age. As a Cleveland transplant by way of New York City her home has become, for many, a soft place to land for those that don't have family or are from out of town no matter where she lives. She gleefully accepts all the new people her daughter and I randomly meet who are in need of a family, for whatever reason, when we invite them to family functions without necessarily receiving her consent. All our welcome at her home for holidays, for no particular reason at all, a hot meal, and love.

She has facilitated an insurmountable amount of young people in starting their careers in education as well as mentorship and philanthropy for marginalized groups and underserved populations. She is an educator by profession and in everyday life. She is always ensuring that my children, specifically, are the best and the brightest even when they don't want to receive her wisdom because they would rather play than learn from grandma Barbara! She is concerned about her family, community, and those that will follow in her footsteps. She is always available to impart her wisdom.

Only those that know her personally know how hard she has single handedly worked to persevere her family, friends, and her colleagues. Only we know how as a single mother for many years she made sure that her daughter had the best education and best experiences through sacrifice, perseverance, dedication, and determination. These sacrifices have even extended to friends and friends of friends. If you are within her grasp higher education will be in

your future! Mrs. Byrd-Bennett has, at some point, been the sole provider for her parents (her father recently passed away), her daughter, her sister, and her niece during a time where the ceiling for women was made of concrete. She has always been a constant support in the lives of her grandchildren exuding the same dedication and sacrifice she extended to their mother.

The purpose of this letter is to let the court know from the people who love her that Mrs. Byrd-Bennett has been a matriarch and pillar of strength for her family, for my family, for strangers, her community, her friends, and colleagues. She has carried the weight of multiple pressures and responsibilities on her shoulders for many years and she is loved, she is needed, and no matter what she is appreciated.

Respectfully,

Lisa Mayti

Christina R. Milano

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

November 7, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

Please consider this a letter of support for former Cleveland Metropolitan Schools Chief Executive Officer Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I first met Barbara in 1998 when she came to Cleveland to lead the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. At that time, I was the Executive Director of one of the oldest and largest college access programs in the nation, Cleveland Scholarship Programs. I was privileged to work with Barbara as she took over what was then a very challenging school district environment.

Throughout the time I worked with Barbara, I often commented to others that we, at last, had a “district CEO” who was making change—positive change. Barbara spent lots of time in the schools talking with the children and their teachers. She was not one to barricade herself in her office. Happily, she also gave me and many others working on district programs, easy access to her and to her staff. She provided our staff of 25 advisors and me with all the tools we needed in order to do our work. Under Barbara’s direction, our staff was treated as a valued part of the school district’s team. Armed with proper tools and better access to work with the district’s students, we began to see more students apply for and enter into post-secondary education. Barbara was a breath of fresh air.

Honorable E. Chang  
November 7, 2016

Page 2

Beyond her professional collaboration and generous extension of support to us all, however, there was something else about Barbara that I could not fail to notice. When she visited a school, the first thing she did was seek out a student and give them some words of advice and good cheer. For even the youngest and smallest of those children, Barbara got down on their level, looked them in the eyes and you could almost feel a visceral sense of the love that she felt for them. The love even came through when photos of Barbara and the Cleveland school children appeared in print.

During the time I knew Barbara, she worked tirelessly on behalf of Cleveland's children. We will be forever in her debt for all she did while she was here. She definitely changed lives.

Yours truly,



Christina R. Milano



Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs

February 6, 2017

Honorable Edmond F. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Re: Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Dear Judge Chang:

I wish to share with you my personal and professional respect and admiration for Barbara Byrd-Bennett and ask that in sentencing her as much leniency be given as possible.

My association with Barbara began in 1998, when she was selected by Mayor Michael R. White to become the first chief executive officer of the Cleveland Municipal School District. I had co-chaired the Citizens' Advisory Committee on School Governance that led to the Ohio Legislature approving mayoral control of the district. During that time, I was President and Executive Director of the Cleveland Foundation (1984 – 2003). The foundation has been engaged in school improvement and reform issues since its founding in 1914. I have also served in government at the local, state and federal level (Undersecretary of Education in the Carter Administration).

From the moment of her announcement as CEO on November 16, she immediately became a presence and a force on behalf of Cleveland's children. I visited many schools with her. I witnessed her advocacy for the district before neighborhood groups, civic organizations, foundations, community forums and the business leadership groups. I served on boards with Barbara. She was and is personable, persuasive and preservin about finding ways for students to succeed despite their limited social economic circumstances.

I know that she worked around the clock to build relationships with cultural, business and civic groups to expand opportunities for the students. I recall with clarity her being a champion for the Cleveland School for the Arts and her personally engaging students in drama. She was a member of United Ways Community Vision Council that I co-chaired.



Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs

There she persuaded the council to support programs in early childhood education as well as special interventions for students making the transition to the ninth grades.

I spent a lot of time with Barbara during the years of her Cleveland leadership. When she left the Cleveland District, I was instrumental in helping Cleveland State University President Michael Schwartz appoint her an Executive-in-Residence in the College of Education (a position I have held in the College of Urban Affairs since 2003).

We share a love of education and the arts. Our daughters are about the same age. We are grandparents of twins about the same age. She is a loving and devoted spouse, mother and grandparent and person of faith. In my opinion, she has considerable integrity despite the mistake she has clearly acknowledged.

We have talked about the challenges and stresses faced in the four major school systems of which she has been employed. We have talked about the stress of the upcoming sentencing. She deeply regrets being in the current situation. I have encouraged her to think of it as not a final chapter since she has so much to offer others.

I believe there is time for epilogue chapter and am willing to help her pursue it as a friend and colleague.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven A. Minter".

Steven A. Minter

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

This letter is a letter of character regarding Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

My name is Jeffery K. Patterson and I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett since she arrived in Cleveland to serve as Chief Executive Officer of the Cleveland Public Schools. I originally had the pleasure of meeting her while I was working in City Government. In addition to that professional relationship, my wife has had a long standing friendship with Mrs. Byrd Bennett and her family. I have known Mrs. Byrd Bennet to be a very loving and compassionate person who cares a great deal about people. She has always been a person that was respected by so many for work that she has done educating the children of our community. While I am aware that Mrs. Byrd-Bennet has entered a guilty plea with regards to her case, and has accepted full responsibility for her actions, I am still very saddened by these unfortunate circumstances.

Over the years, my family and I have often enjoyed Sunday dinners and other special occasions with Mrs. Byrd Bennet's family. I have had the opportunity to see her act as a wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, grandmother, and friend. In each role, she shows commitment, passion, and love to all. Despite the death of her father, and the ailing health of her mother, you can always find her doing what she can to support her family. She truly adores her family and relishes the importance of family and all that family represents. It is clear that she relishes the role of family matriarch and is the rock of her family.

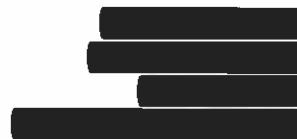
I have always known her to be an industrious, hardworking, dedicated person who is community-minded and always wanted the children of our community to have the opportunity for success. She has always shown a particular interest in those students who faced various social and economic barriers to success. She has always been a very loyal and extremely considerate supportive person who has the ability to see and understand things from another person's perspective and utilize that insight to help them overcome some of the challenges that they may encounter. She has been such a positive force in the lives of so many. Her commitment to help the children of our community is something that she will always be remembered for and the people here will never forget.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Jeffery K. Patterson

Paulette Poncelet, PhD



January 3, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am writing to share my perspective on the character of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I am aware that she admitted wrongdoing relative to a contract in Chicago. I met Barbara in 1998 when she became the first CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District under a plan to shift the District from State control to Mayoral governance following a revolving door of superintendents and years of District failure on multiple levels. Under the District's first CEO, a strong commitment to student centered and data informed decisions emerged immediately. Barbara and her team went to work reviewing data, prioritizing needs and formulating action plans to address them. I was hired to build a research and evaluation function. I heard again and again from people who had worked for the District for years that no superintendent had exhibited the level of competence coupled with innovation as Barbara Byrd-Bennett. People expressed both relief and excitement. She had credibility with teachers and principals. After all, she was an educator - and she was smart. She could engage effectively with any and all constituents: teachers, administrators, families, foundations, community leaders, state and national leaders, and most importantly, students. Yes, the new CEO loved the students of Cleveland with an unwavering belief in them, and it showed. Educating Cleveland's Children became her mission.

It is important to state that education as a whole was not using data when Barbara came to Cleveland as CEO and insisted on it. She wanted literacy and numeracy measured regularly through benchmark assessments to inform instruction to be sure, and promoted opportunities for teachers and principals to learn how to use them to advance student learning. This was not measurement for measurement's sake. Barbara was about using data to accelerate learning. She was on the leading edge of assessment for learning, also known as formative assessment. Barbara introduced Cleveland to Dylan William's seminal work in formative assessment in which teachers use a variety of techniques during instruction to get feedback and make ongoing adjustments to teaching and

learning in real time. She wanted attendance, suspension, expulsion, graduation and truancy data; and she wanted them sliced and diced in multiple ways and presented graphically. She began monthly meetings with groups of principals to discuss school data, improvement strategies and goals - quantified goals. She saw the principal as accountable for the success of the school. The unit for improving the life chances of students is the school and the lever for improving a school is school leadership. I cannot state strongly enough that Barbara was ahead of the education curve on this theory of change, the centrality of school leadership, the prudent use of data and the professional accountability of principals.

Barbara brought a renewed sense of hope to Cleveland and she educated many of us about theories and education practices that were yielding positive results nationally. She introduced the community to the work of Lauren Resnick at the University of Pittsburgh whereby talent and intelligence are not fixed and unchangeable but mutable - with effort. Resnick's powerful principles of learning that penetrate the educational core were a departure from long-held assumptions about the nature of intelligence. "An effort-based school replaces the assumption that aptitude determines what and how much students learn with the assumption that sustained and directed effort can yield high achievement for all students" (Resnick, 1999). Barbara brought this research to Cleveland and asked all to suspend their disbelief in a city with one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. Once again, she bolstered our commitment to educating Cleveland's children. Our students' zip codes need not be their destiny. Barbara advocated that our students can *get smart* when we create schools and classrooms for effort-based education, and with the help of Lauren Resnick, she showed us how to do it.

There are many examples of powerful initiatives that Barbara implemented in Cleveland, but one in particular stands out to me in its magnitude and scope and her fearlessness in planning and execution — the phasing out of 25 middle schools and the restructuring of 21 K-5 elementary schools into K-8 schools. One year into her tenure, Barbara concluded that after years of negative trends in achievement, attendance and discipline and increasing class sizes in middle schools, a restructuring of K-5 elementary schools into K-8 schools by adding a grade each school year could turn things arounds; in essence, making child development the focal point of middle-level education. Barbara believed that socially, emotionally and intellectually, our early adolescents would be more likely to thrive in the K-8 environment. I was asked to conduct a multi-year evaluation of the restructuring, which I did in partnership with the independent research organization Metis Associates. Each K-5 school contemplating the addition of middle grades had to assess community support, engage in extensive planning and allocate resources carefully to support the transition. School communities embraced the restructuring. Barbara knew that parent support for restructuring schools often closer to home than a middle school would be strong. Communication and logistics requirements were enormous. Principals, teachers and central office stepped up to keep families updated on changes and to solicit their feedback. Principals planned extensively for dealing with early adolescents by crafting processes with opportunities for more autonomy, self-management, decision

making and leadership to address their development needs. Larger furniture and bathroom fixtures were ordered. Breakfast and lunch portions were resized. Case studies showed that child development was the highest priority in the restructured schools (Poncelet & Metis Associates, 2004). Moreover, the middle grades experience in these schools did not mirror the elementary grades experience. The middle grades environment created in the K-8 schools was responsive to the psychosocial and cognitive needs of early adolescents. An impact analysis of reading and math achievement revealed that learning gains posted by 6th grade students in the K-8 schools exceeded those posted by 6th grade students in middle schools suggesting that “the continuity provided by a K-8 school is preferable to the discontinuity associated with transitioning to a middle grades school” (Poncelet & Metis Associates, 2004). Barbara had been right; and thanks to her vision and leadership, Cleveland’s middle grades students were in safer, more nurturing environments and achieving at higher levels.

I remained in Cleveland until Barbara’s departure in 2006 at which time I accepted the position of Chief of Research, Assessment and Accountability in Pittsburgh, but I had the privilege of working with her again in Chicago in early 2013 when she asked if I was interested in establishing performance evaluation systems in Chicago Public Schools since Illinois had recently passed legislation outlining teacher and principal evaluation requirements. The project was massive in scale, as were nearly all initiatives in Chicago. Designing and implementing performance evaluations for 21,000 teachers involved collaboration with the powerful Chicago Teachers Union and principals to move from a rudimentary checklist to a process that included multiple classroom observations by principals and assistant principals using a detailed rubric that describes the elements of great teaching, pre and post observation conferences by principals and teachers, a cadre of observation specialists to support principals and assistant principals and ensure inter-rater reliability, a new districtwide technology system to keep actions transparent and all participants up-to-date, and student growth measures. Barbara’s vision provided the thread that guided all: you cannot accomplish anything of lasting importance in the way of improving student achievement without great teaching, professional development is essential to strengthening teaching and most importantly, the purpose of teacher evaluation is to inform professional development opportunities. Barbara, always a systems thinker, wanted a *system for talent development and continuous improvement*, not an evaluation strategy with the primary purpose of sorting teachers for dismissal as called for by many. The launching of a teacher evaluation system in Chicago was successful as evidenced across three years of study by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research. The observation process was perceived positively by teachers and administrators and it was differentiating the quality of teaching with actionable information more effectively than the old checklist. Sporte, S.E., and Jiang, J.Y. (2016) reported on 2014-15 evaluation results:

90% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed the observation process encouraged them to reflect on their practice, and 88% reported it had changed their teaching.

77% of administrators reported most or all of their teachers had incorporated the feedback into their teaching and 60% of administrators reported most or all of their teachers had made noticeable improvements over the year.

83% of tenured teachers received evaluation ratings in the top two performance categories compared to 94% under the previous checklist process. Teachers in the top performance category shifted notably from 69% to 29%. Under the previous checklist, 87% of non-tenured teachers received ratings in the top two categories compared to 75% by 2014-15 under the new system.

Barbara knew what teacher evaluation needed to be in order to yield actionable information and have a meaningful, constructive and sustained impact on adults and ultimately students. She made it a priority and never wavered in her commitment and support.

I hope that these examples demonstrate the strong service and exceptionality of Barbara Byrd-Bennett as an educator, advocate, visionary and leader. There are many more examples but I am limited here to recounting just a few. I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to walk with her and make a difference in the lives of so many.

Sincerely,



Paulette Poncelet, PhD

Poncelet, P. & Metis Associates (2004). Restructuring schools for the social, emotional and intellectual development of early adolescents. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 9(2), 81-96.

Resnick, L. B. (1999, June 16). Making America Smarter. *Education Week Century Series*. 18(40), 38-40.

Sporte, S.E., & Jiang, J.Y. (2016). Teacher evaluation in practice: Year 3 teacher and administrator perceptions of REACH. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

ALBERT B. RATNER

January 11, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. It is my understanding that she has pleaded guilty and is about to be sentenced. I have no knowledge of those issues.

This letter is being written on behalf of the Barbara Byrd-Bennett that I know. I live in Cleveland, Ohio, and am Co-Chairman *Emeritus* of Board of Forest City Realty Trust, a nationwide real estate firm. Over my lifetime, I have been involved in areas of education and poverty. Statistics show that poverty can only be defeated by people receiving and taking part in education and the work force. It was in these endeavors that I met Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

I met Barbara Byrd-Bennett when she came to Cleveland in 1998. Over her eight years in Cleveland, I worked closely with her in efforts to make our Cleveland Municipal School District a more positive force in the Community. She has been a mentor to me. During her time in Cleveland, she taught me so much. From Barbara I learned that educational systems do not center on their most precious asset, the children. She raised the standards of what should be expected of children and that all children, regardless of place or home, could be taught to be responsible, caring human beings. This is not an easy task in Cleveland, Chicago or anywhere that life is filled with disappointments, making it hard to gain knowledge.

Barbara has a great love of children. She was able to work within the Cleveland Community with parents, unions, and everyone else. She has taught me that it takes a village to raise a child. She persevered, through much opposition in Cleveland, to put children first. She taught me to never give up in the quest to help children receive an education as a pathway to participate in the opportunities in America.

She taught me that these children are our children, and if we want a better life, then these children need a better life. She has inspired me and many others in Cleveland and in the Country to continue to fight for more opportunities for children who live in our urban

areas. Her devotion to her own family serves as a model for how she treats other families.

With the work we do in urban cities, we often become discouraged. When this happens to me, I think of Barbara and the wonderful work she did for the children of Cleveland. She continues to inspire me to do what we must do to help our children.

If I were to pick one take-away that I learned from Barbara it is, no matter the circumstances of the child, no matter where they come from, give them a chance to better themselves and become part of the system. America is still the Land of Opportunity. I hope that Barbara will be able to continue to be an inspiration to me and others.

Sincerely yours,



Albert B. Ratner

ABR/mrp



February 14, 2017

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Re: Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Dear Judge Chang:

I am writing to you to respectfully request leniency for Barbara Byrd-Bennett, my dear friend and former supervisor. As you consider her punishment, I appreciate the time you are taking to understand Barbara, her life's work in public education as well as her more private contributions as a mother, grandmother and friend.

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for nearly 20 years. I met Barbara in 1998 as I had been appointed general counsel of the Cleveland Public Schools by the then-Mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, Michael R. White. Several months after my appointment, Mayor White appointed Barbara as the system's first Chief Executive Officer and his most high profile appointment at a time when he had just been given control of the public schools. Barbara and I continued to work together until 2006 when Barbara left her position as CEO. Since 2006, Barbara and I have remained very good friends, our families are close, and I have the privilege of being the godmother to her twin grandsons.

In 1998, the Cleveland Public Schools had the dubious distinction of being one of the Nation's poorest performing school districts, financially bankrupt/under State receivership, and recently released from one of the longest running school desegregation cases. The system needed a new leader with an unwavering commitment to prioritize the needs of children even if that meant that adults would lose jobs, unions needed to make concessions, schools needed to be closed and the community, via new tax levies, would need to pay for the sweeping change.

Barbara had the expertise, passion, strength and unyielding confidence of a Mayor who was not necessarily perceived as "easy" to deal with. Ultimately, Barbara reversed the trajectory of failure that had plagued the Cleveland schools since the early 1970s. During her tenure, State receivership and fiscal watch ended. Central office attracted talent that had long been missing. The Cleveland community voted to impose a tax on itself that allowed the City to finally rebuild and renovate the system's 100 plus school buildings. Student achievement rose.

More so than any other superintendent in Cleveland's recent history, Barbara helped the larger Cleveland community "suspend its disbelief" and begin to believe once again in Cleveland's children.

Twelve years after mayoral control was instituted, Mayor White's decision to hire Barbara is still credited as the most important factor in bringing a new-found, but lasting, stability to the Cleveland schools.<sup>1</sup>

During her Cleveland tenure, I served as Barbara's chief of staff from 2000-2006. As chief of staff, I was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school district, and served as the acting CEO when Barbara was away from the office. While I did not know Barbara before she arrived in Cleveland, I believe that I became Barbara's most trusted and closest advisor. During this period, I have first-hand knowledge of her work style, work ethic and the standards to which she held herself and employees. Our interactions were best described as ongoing, high stakes, time sensitive and high priority.

In 2006, Barbara stepped down as the CEO of the Cleveland Public Schools. At her request and insistence, I assumed the position of CEO on an interim basis to facilitate a smooth transition until 2007 when I left the Cleveland schools and accepted the position of Chief of Staff and Deputy Chancellor of the DC Public Schools (where I served until 2015). In both systems, I enjoyed a strong reputation as both hard-working, ethical and dependable in a school system that was failing students, void of financial controls and under extraordinary public pressure to improve quickly.<sup>2</sup>

I credit Barbara with developing me as a chief of staff and manager during our tenure together in Cleveland. At age 28, I was not fully prepared for the enormous task of serving on a leadership team at a large, failing organization. With Barbara as my immediate supervisor and closest contact, I was given the chance to grow in that role, develop the expertise needed to support the work of educating children and the management skills necessary to coordinate and align the resources of various departments around one common mission and vision. I was subsequently offered the number two position in Washington D.C. simply based on the interaction D.C.'s incoming Chancellor had with the Cleveland schools under Barbara's leadership. For the next eight years, I contributed the same stability and saw even greater student growth in DC because of what I had learned from Barbara in Cleveland.

Based on my work experience in Cleveland as well as my ongoing friendship with Barbara, I have personal knowledge in at least three areas that I would like to share with you: (1) her work style and the work culture she creates, (2) the supports critical to her professional success; and (3) her personal character, contributions to her family and how she has reacted and responded to the situation she now faces.

The crimes to which Barbara has pled are crimes of greed and selfishness; the crimes are completely inconsistent with the selfless, thoughtful leader I knew Barbara to be as the head of the Cleveland schools. Strong, vocal and decisive leadership are essentially prerequisites for systems like Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago where failure and complacency are institutionalized. But with Barbara, that strength was never used to exclude disagreement or objection to actions that weren't in the best interest of the school system. To some entrenched in the system, her style was off-putting. As both a woman and an "out of town," her strength was often cast as a weakness.

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<sup>1</sup> "Mayoral control of the Cleveland city schools has brought stability but other improvements hard to measure," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 20, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> "Interim CEO known for skills, hard work." *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 17, 2006, B1; "Lisa Ruda leaves her post, and also leaves a revitalized school system." *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2015, B1.

However, Barbara's strength was never a barrier to open, candid discussion and disagreement. Barbara and I often disagreed in our respective roles. At no time did Barbara's strength and stature ever chill open discussion, honest feedback or disagreement. At no time did Barbara ever push or ask me to take action that was in any way inappropriate, illegal or immoral. But, Barbara always demanded the excellence and urgency we'd freely give if the careers of our own biological children were at stake. For example, Barbara worked late into the evening or early morning hours and regularly wrote notes directing me to "get something done" or "I want this to happen." Those types of directives were her style and she rightfully relied on a team of competent and vocal staff members to raise challenges, issues or objections to her proposed course of action. These statements were never interpreted to mean that I was expected to complete the task if there were issues, legal or moral, actual or perception. In fact, Barbara often told staff "not to leave her naked" or not to leave her feeling like "the Emperor didn't have any clothes." Barbara was a stickler for process and rules. She never let the press or urgency of business be an excuse to short-cut process or procedure particularly with contracts or resolutions requiring School Board approval or Mayor support.

While strong and determined, Barbara was also selfless as CEO of the Cleveland schools. Barbara knew the name of our building custodian long before I ever did notwithstanding the fact I had started working at the school district months before Barbara arrived. Barbara taught me to embrace our students, their families and their experiences. She knew their names, their stories and continued to circle back to support them by creating a scholarship fund in her name or internships for them. But, it was the little things that Barbara did for our students that I will always remember. Barbara picked the "strongest" (and most vocal) little girl at a nearby elementary school to tutor. Barbara not only tutored Pat H., but mentored her as well as introducing her to federal judges and taking her to luncheons to get a sense of what the world could hold for her. Even after Pat asked a sitting federal judge why he wasn't good enough to be on "The People's Court," Barbara still found time for Pat to travel with her. For other students, she did the small things. For example, I remember the time that Barbara arranged (and paid for) a group of high school students to have their hair done at a professional beauty shop. It wasn't a special or formal occasion, but it was very special to those young ladies.

This is the selflessness I saw as Barbara led the Cleveland schools. In fact, I saw the same selflessness when she returned home after pleading guilty in your courtroom in October 2015. By this point, Barbara had formally resigned months earlier from her position as Chicago's CEO. After remaining home for several days, Barbara asked me to take her to run an errand – the first time she'd step out of the house after her plea was widely reported throughout Chicago and Cleveland. She had me take her to the bank to send money to a Chicago student (I believe his name was Joseph) to help him with living expenses at college. This is the selflessness that characterized Barbara's career in public education.

When Barbara left the Cleveland schools, I wasn't surprised that she was tapped to take on similar roles in Detroit or Chicago. After all, Barbara had the experience, success and passion to turn the impossible into possible. I was surprised that Barbara didn't surround herself with a stronger administrative and leadership team as she assumed roles in Detroit and Chicago. Moreover, I worried about the multiple short-term roles as consultant and employee that she assumed. In Cleveland, Barbara's affairs were always managed by a team that included a secretary, executive assistant and special assistant. Those individuals, for over six years, worked together to manage Barbara's calendar, speaking or consultant roles to ensure that time and expenses were appropriately recorded and charged. I worried that Barbara didn't have the necessary supports in place to protect her and allow her to lead a much larger school system than either Cleveland or Detroit. Chicago proved my worries to be true. While it was ultimately Barbara's responsibility to create the team around her, I believe the lack of structure around

her as she assumed new roles strongly supports the fact that Barbara made a serious error in judgment rather than a deliberate decision to put her needs above those of the schools she committed to serve.

Barbara and I remain very close friends to this day. Our friendship includes the duration of this matter from when her home was first searched to now as she awaits sentencing. Publicly, Barbara has fully accepted responsibility for her actions, cooperated with the government and in so doing, saved taxpayer dollars and the public pain that accompanies any trial. Significantly, Barbara's decision to accept responsibility similarly saves the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) additional loss of credibility and affords CPS the opportunity to more quickly rebuild trust with its staff, students and the larger community.

As you would expect, the decision to admit fault has had significant consequences. Barbara won't likely work another day in a public school; her forty plus year career in education and ability to earn any income as one of the Nation's longest serving superintendents is effectively over. Similarly, Barbara's standing in the community has dropped significantly, and while many people privately express support, the public shame and ridicule has negatively impacted her as well as the rest of her family. At a national level, working for Barbara was a source of pride and respect. Her name or reference no longer carries that honor.

At home, Barbara's contributions to the Cleveland schools over ten years ago, have been erased from minds and buildings with the news of her plea in Chicago. I've been with Barbara as we have walked into stores, restaurants and other public places where others not supportive have stared, muttered negative statements or simply given looks of disdain. I've been with Barbara when she has received letters from insurance carriers or banks advising that they would no longer be able to maintain her accounts because of her public plea.

Barbara's family is very small and as you'd expect, the pain is felt by the entire family. I've seen first-hand the toll the past two years has taken on Barbara's physical and mental health, her husband Bruce and her daughter Nailah.

Through all the public shame, I can share with you that Barbara has still been the ever-present grandmother to her twin grandsons. Barbara regularly picks up the twins from school and provides their child care. She helps them with their homework in a way that few grandparents can. When the twins are assigned a book to read, she purchases the book and reads it with them so she can monitor their progress, ensure they comprehend what they read and push them to understand and appreciate plots and themes beyond the written text. She regularly attends baseball, basketball and school events *for the boys. Barbara doesn't use the public shame that is now attached to her limit her willingness to be there for her grandsons.*

Barbara remains a very loyal friend. In 2002, she was the person who stayed on the telephone with me throughout the night as I struggled to write my grandfather's eulogy that I would be giving the next morning. Barbara was the one person who showed up at 5:00 am on a frigid January morning in 2007 to sit in the hospital with my mother as I was undergoing major surgery. She is the friend I called from the critical care unit when my 23-year-old godson died unexpectedly in a car accident in 2013. Barbara is there for me and my family whenever and however I need her. She remains a source of advice, support and friendship.

Roughly one month after Barbara entered her guilty plea, my grandmother died. Barbara and my grandmother had deep affection for each other – a relationship that was built during my tenure at the Cleveland schools and maintained through the years. My grandmother was aware of the charges against Barbara as well as Barbara's decision to admit guilt. My grandmother's faith in Barbara never

waned nor did her support for Barbara and her family. Likewise, Barbara never failed to pray for or ask about my grandmother. My family would have understood had Barbara not come to my grandmother's funeral. After all, it has been only about a month since Barbara pled guilty in your courtroom and the story dominated the Cleveland news. But I knew a different Barbara, and had no doubt that Barbara and her family would honor my grandmother even while their personal pain would have made it easier to stay home. Barbara, Bruce, Nailah, her son-in-law Ed and grandsons attended my grandmother's funeral just as her family had done 12 years earlier when my grandfather died – at a time when Barbara's reputation and stature was much higher and she headlined the news for more positive actions. The support of Barbara and her family for me has not wavered even though her life circumstances have changed significantly.

Privately, Barbara has never blamed anyone, including her colleagues or staff, for the crimes she has admitted guilt or the facts and circumstances giving rise to the contract which underlies these crimes. In fact, I feel quite differently. During my tenure in Cleveland, I witnessed staff members who were reluctant or "afraid" to challenge Barbara and I have said the same to Barbara. Some of those staff members followed Barbara from Cleveland to Detroit to Chicago. I question both their competence and resolve to challenge or disagree with Barbara. Never once, has Barbara concurred with my assessment or cast any of the blame on these colleagues. In private, to me, one of her closest friends, it would have been easy to point a finger at others deserving of some blame. However, Barbara has never done that.

I remain firm in my belief that Barbara made a grave error in judgment. It is an error for which she accepted responsibility and in so doing, she has lost her job, faces civil judgment and which is likely to overshadow a lifelong career of public service. But, I also believe Barbara's actions were not motivated by greed or a deliberate intent to put herself over the needs or best interests of Chicago or its children.

I respectfully ask you to consider her life-long contributions to public education, the loss in income and stature she already incurred, and the fact that neither the Chicago nor Cleveland community is made better or safer by Barbara serving any significant time in prison. While her mistake is incredibly serious, I do not believe the mistake should define her as a public educator or a person. This is certainly part of her story, but by no means, should it be her last chapter or the title of her biography. At Barbara's age, a prison sentence of seven to fourteen years could be a life sentence. Her actions do not warrant such a sentence. Barbara Byrd-Bennett deserves an opportunity to do better.

My letter was a bit longer than I had hoped because I wanted to share what I think is my unique perspective as her former chief of staff and as her friend. Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to consider my thoughts and perspective.

Sincerely,



Lisa Marie Ruda

Honorable Edmond Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

January 15, 2017

Dear Judge Chang:

Please permit me to introduce myself. My name is Charles L. Scott and I am a retired police sergeant for the Cleveland Police Department and a former Special United States Deputy Marshal for the Cleveland Federal Court.

In 1999, I was appointed by Mayor Michael R. White to serve as Barbara Byrd-Bennett's personal security and to lead the security detail for her office. From 1999 until 2006 when Barbara Byrd-Bennett retired, I worked closely with her. We started each day at about 7:00 in the morning. We would visit at least two schools before she went to the office. And it was an early day if we ended by 8:00 that night. She worked weekends at her office or visited churches or attended community events. She was always thinking about how she could help children to better their education and to get the school district "on the right track". She always said the district was not an employment agency but a service agency for the children that she called her "pumpkins". So, she started a program where if an employee at the main office drew a salary that person was required to tutor at least one student for one day each week. I tutored a young boy with his reading and she tutored a girl at the same school.

I can think of many examples when she directly intervened for a child. Once when she was visiting a school a student was going to be suspended because she did not have a pencil. Ms. Bennett said the girl should be in school and not tossed out of school because she did not have a pencil. She gave the student the pencils she had in her purse and sent the student back to the class. She went into the classroom to talk with the teacher. When we returned to the office she told me she needed to revise the district suspension policy because too many students were suspended for the wrong reasons. The next day she sent packages of pencils to the student and enough pencils for the entire class.

Another time when we were visiting a school a young man was behaving inappropriately in the cafeteria and disrespecting the female students. He even disrespected Ms. Bennett. So, she pulled him out of the cafeteria and met with him privately in the principal's office. She found out the young man could not read and was failing his classes. She met with members of her staff and asked for volunteers to work with the student. She put together a schedule for him for each day and after school.

Time passed and the roof that collapsed at East High School had been replaced and a new state of the art gymnasium was also built at the school with the levy funds. There was a special ceremony to celebrate with the press and dignitaries all present. In the middle of her interview, a young man came up to her and asked her if she remembered him. I do not know if she really did recognize him but she said yes and the boy gave her a big hug. He thanked her for what she did for him. He told her that he graduated and he was working at the water department for the city and he was going to the community college at night. It was the same boy she removed from the cafeteria. When we left and we were in the car, she said you see Sergeant Scott this is why I do this. Now this child has a future ahead of him.

She cared for the students and she cared all of the staff. There was chemical explosion at Collingwood High School. She had the custodial and janitorial staff from that school and other nearby schools to meet with her that afternoon. She asked if they would work throughout the night to have the school ready for students the following day. They all agreed and then she went and bought food, water, sodas and desserts for all of the men and women. She took it there herself and stayed through much of the night.

On numerous occasions when I was with her she used her own funds to purchase clothing, coats, boots, personal items and school supplies for the children she met on the school visits. We visited the homes and attended the funerals for the children that died while she was the CEO.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett's character and honesty are beyond reproach. She is loved and respected by the Cleveland community and all who know and worked with her. She always worked to provide the professionals and the children with what she thought they needed to be successful. In everything she did she was always a professional and always went a little extra beyond and above the call of duty.

I know Ms. Bennett accepted responsibility because this is what she does and who she is. If I could take her place during this sentencing, I would do so gladly. I know this had to be a one time error in her judgement.

In closing I would like to say the Federal Courts have always been fair and just. I respectfully ask your Honor to please consider all the good she has done throughout her life and to consider a non-confinement punishment. I ask the Court to have mercy. She has much more to offer and can do so much more good for people.

Respectfully,

*Charles L. Scott*

Charles L. Scott

[REDACTED]

March 14, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

My name is LaVonne M. Sheffield and I am writing on behalf of my friend and colleague Barbara Byrd Bennett – or as she is known to her friends B3. I met Barbara when she moved to Cleveland to become Superintendent of the Cleveland Public Schools (CPS) in 1998. I served as the Chief of Staff to Mayor White, Cleveland, Ohio. During that period, the Mayor had oversight of the school district; therefore, Barbara and I worked closely together for a number of years.

Because of my position, I can personally attest to the great work Barbara performed on behalf of the children of Cleveland. She worked tirelessly engaging the community, teachers and leaders of the schools. Since education was of keen interest to me, Barbara and I would sit for extended periods of time to think through strategy around raising the achievement of troubled schools in the city. Barbara hired great talent and leaders – many of whom are my friends today. Barbara and her team were exceptional in the work they performed to move the schools forward. However, Barbara also stood out in her commitment to Cleveland and the Mayor.

Over the years, our paths diverged, but we all remained good friends and colleagues. Always seeking each other out at the professional organizational meetings and taking time to discuss our current projects and experiences. In fact, when asked to join the Broad Foundation Urban Superintendent's Academy, Barbara was there to lead us in professional discussions regarding transforming urban school districts. She provided mentorship to many of the prospective superintendents to guide them successfully in their new positions.

When I left Cleveland, I assumed the Chief of Staff and Chief Academic Officer for Detroit Public Schools in Michigan, where Barbara also served. Since Detroit was my home, I felt significant gratitude that she volunteered to take over the Chief Academic position when the Governor intervened and assume responsibility for the Detroit Public Schools. Here again, Barbara brought in a solid team to drive change and improvement with success.

During this ordeal, I have maintained close contact with Barbara, because I know her character. We've had discussions about the situation and she has assumed full responsibility. I believe she is even more disappointed that she failed the Chicago

Public Schools and the children that she has worked and lived for her entire life. Of late, she is so distressed about her daughter and grandchildren who she has given her entire life to support and guide them. I had to laugh when Barbara had a few of her friends to purchase baby seats so the grandchildren were safe when she decided to hang out with her girlfriends. When issues confronted her with her daughter, we'd talk about the situation and work through the challenges. This I know, she is a dedicated and loving individual committed to her family, friends, and the children in the districts where she served. What we both knew is that if we were successful in providing our children a great educational experience, we offered them a way out of often very distressed communities and the opportunity to be successful.

For the above reasons and many more, I would urge Your Honor to consider her life's work as you begin your deliberation. Barbara Byrd Bennett has given her life to the children of this country as well as to her family, friends and colleagues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



LaVonne M. Sheffield  
Superintendent in Residency  
Jobs for the Future  


[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

October 17, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I first met Barbara Byrd-Bennett in 2002, when she hired me to develop a district testing and instructional program for the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD). At that time Barbara served as the CMSD's CEO. I also sat on her Administrative Cabinet. Barbara and I have remained friends and colleagues since that point.

Barbara has admitted her guilt, and she has expressed to me her profound regret for her transgressions. I write to you not to challenge or minimize Barbara's conduct in connection with her guilty plea, nor to suggest that she is without flaws. Rather, I write to share with you my perspective on Barbara's dedication to student success and family.

Since I began my career in education in 1969, I have worked with six different chief school officers. Barbara's dedication and passion for educating students is unparalleled among those six school leaders. When I worked with Barbara at CMSD, her first question was always "*How will an action benefit children?*" when any course of action was proposed to her. To me, the driving force behind almost all of her decisions at CMSD was helping students to learn and to succeed.

Arguably, over the past decade or more, the focus and pressure on educational leadership across the country has been on drilling and re-drilling students on test material with the primary objective of raising district test scores. Barbara's focus, however, has remained steadfast on improving the lives of each student through quality teaching and learning. In difficult financial times at CMSD, Barbara's response to weak test scores was not to drill students on the test materials. Instead, she found the funding to develop an array of appropriate educational materials for teachers. These materials provided the teachers with day-to-day ideas and actions they could take to authentically move their students' learning forward—to build knowledge rather than mere test taking skills. District test scores showed that her focus on quality educational materials and student learning was effective.

In and out of the classroom, Barbara was sensitive to the needs of urban students. She understood that urban students from impoverished areas need more than knowledge in reading and math to succeed in life, and at CMSD she encouraged a multicultural perspective about teaching, learning, and human success. To this end, I remember how big Barbara's heart was when cohorts of CMSD high school students were being prepared to go off to college. All of these students were on "free and reduced lunch." Barbara knew that these students did not have

parents who had gone to college, or at times even completed high school. She understood that many of these students did not have anyone at home equipped to guide them through the process of applying to colleges. Barbara initiated a program to help the students prepare the necessary paperwork for college entry (like applications and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Beyond that, once students were accepted to colleges Barbara organized all the District's administrators to gather materials essential for each student's transition to college life. These were materials included shampoo, notebooks, thumb drives, stamps, calculators, pencils, and much more. Not only did these college-bound students benefit from this project, but administrators benefitted, as well. Many of us developed deeper insight into the complexity of helping economically disadvantaged students enter the middle-class world. This seemingly simple project made me a more insightful and better administrator.

Barbara also recognized the importance of parents and educators working together. Whenever new programs were rolled out or schools needed to be closed, Barbara held numerous parent, community, and neighborhood meetings to both inform and gather input about the project. I always found her inclusive approach effective and, moreover, respectful of parents and community members. At CMSD, she created a multicultural environment where all participants were encouraged to share their ideas and defend their ideas and perspectives.

I would be remiss not to mention her love of family and friends. Her two twin grandsons are the loves of her life. She has committed herself to providing them with the affection and guidance that only adoring grandparents can provide. Her eyes sparkle when she talks about them.

For me, Barbara has been a committed and supportive mentor and friend. When I worked for her, she provided me with guidance and numerous opportunities for personal and professional growth. As a friend, she is an attentive listener. She shares warmth and wisdom, and accepts it in return.

Your Honor, Barbara has made mistakes. Although the impressions I have provided above do not excuse her mistakes, I believe they reveal that she has demonstrated much strength of character and added to the quality and success of a multitude of student and adult lives. I include myself among this multitude.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Donna Snodgrass, Ph.D.

Gary Talpas  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

October 19, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor,

I am writing to you in the interest of providing a character reference for Barbara Byrd-Bennett whom I worked for at the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD, and now known as the Cleveland Metropolitan School District) from 1999 to 2005. I started out in the Government Affairs Department where I worked for one year, then was transferred by Barbara's request into her office where I worked as one of four Special Assistants. I primarily managed her assignments to Executive Staff, drafted her correspondence, and worked on special projects in conjunction with the Chief of Staff's office.

I loved working in Barbara's administration. She brought a thrilling certainty of purpose to her role that was contagious. She used expansive enterprise thinking in a system that hadn't experienced it in a long time, if ever. She combined metrics and passion in a supercollider to drive an engine of change, demanding long-term thinking at every opportunity.

As a manager of Barbara's assignments to Executive Staff, I had a comprehensive view of all the major projects and issues she was dealing with on a daily basis. Barbara had an uncompromising expectation that people reporting to her share her top-line priority of every action needing to benefit children and education. I saw her first-hand turn departments around by giving them the necessary motivation, and the resource of her expertise, to escape outdated modes of thinking and get on the right track. Anything that ended up on her radar was dealt with, period. A non-profit agency wanting data on a certain program? They got the data, not the run-around. A parent with a security concern? That parent received direct contact from our Department of Security, right away. She plowed through pushback and never wavered. This role gave me a rare window into the complexities of her work, and I marveled at her steel core of strength. I got to go home every single day knowing I was part of making a difference.

I was also responsible for correspondence going out under Barbara's name to parents, community, and local leaders; as well as local, state, and federal government representatives. This was another means by which I witnessed Barbara's compassionate dedication to our district and the respect she had for everyone. The legislator that wrote requesting details about a certain newly-implemented program and the

person who wrote to tell Barbara she was the worst thing that ever happened to Cleveland both received genuine, thoughtful responses because that was the standard that Barbara set. Every person that reached out to her was in her mind a stakeholder, or at least a potential stakeholder. Through this work I saw how Barbara was always focused on the long-term. Our current students are our children, are our future citizens, future workers, future families, future parents of our future students... Barbara's belief in public education's crucial role in this cycle was always top of mind. She allowed those of us working in her administration to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

One of Barbara's most personal missions at CMSD was to implement a universal feeding program. This meant that free breakfast and lunch was available to every child, K-12, with the only qualification being that they were a student—not based on family income or any other externally-determined factor. If you attended school, you could have breakfast and lunch at no cost—it was that simple. What I learned during this process was that for some of our students, these would sometimes be their only opportunities to eat on that particular day. Barbara was adamant that effective instruction was not possible if our students were hungry, and she toiled to make this happen. It is a great example of her passion for children's welfare, and is the thing I am most proud of to have been a part of during my employment at CMSD. Barbara really understood that public schools become de facto solutions for so many challenges that poor children face, and she was always striving to meet those challenges on behalf of "her kids".

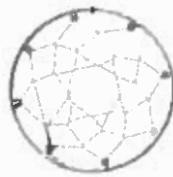
On an entirely personal note, Barbara was very supportive of me when I decided to relocate to Los Angeles from Cleveland where I had been born and had lived my whole life up until that point. I did this with not a lot of forethought, and without having a job or knowing anyone. In hindsight, it was as exactly as insane as it sounds, but that's what I did. I was in no way prepared for how hard it would be. But Barbara did understand. While running a giant public school system, and dealing with all the concomitant pressures, logging 18-hours days seven days a week, Barbara still found the time to think of me every once in a while, and send me a letter of encouragement. For Barbara, it might have been a small thing. For me, it made all the difference in the world. Out of the whole first year which was so hard, there was one day, about six months in, which was the sole time I thought, "Maybe I've made the biggest mistake of my life and can't make it work here". Believe it or not, when I got home there was a letter in the mailbox from Barbara telling me to believe in myself! I never felt that doubtful way again. Things have worked out so nicely for me, I am grateful every day, but I gladly keep in touch with the resonance of that difficult time and the depth it brought to me as a person. Barbara is inextricably linked to this life lesson. She will always be in my heart because of her thoughtful, caring actions when I needed them the most. That is Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Please know I am available to you if you would like any further information or clarification.

Sincerely,



Gary Talpas



DreamCatcher Educational Consulting

January 26, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am writing on behalf of my colleague and friend, Dr. Barbara Byrd-Bennett regarding her character, values and virtue. As President of Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio, I had the opportunity to work closely with Dr. Byrd-Bennett beginning with her tenure in 1998 as the CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District through my position with the largest community college in the State of Ohio (32,000 students) and serving on her Board of Trustees (appointed by the Mayor of Cleveland). I believe that I am in a strong position to have witnessed all aspects of her leadership but more importantly the true person.

Barbara accomplished much for the children of Cleveland and the inner ring suburban children who attended some of the high quality specialized schools within CMSD. During her tenure in Cleveland, she accomplished much and made great gains in academic achievement for the students. Working closely with the business, civic, philanthropic and religious communities, Barbara was able to pass local tax levies to support the schools financially and keep open the doors of neighborhood schools. With the backing of and partnership with ethical and accomplished Cleveland mayors, she forged many alliances including the collective bargaining units to save and preserve many schools on the brink of closure. It was these alliances that allowed her to use her true talents in forging a successful future for the Cleveland Municipal School District.

Dr. Byrd-Bennett routinely demonstrated her commitment to the increasing immigrant population in Cleveland by ensuring that the students felt safe and protected while pursuing their education. She held Board meetings in the neighborhood schools with large immigrant populations to denote her support as well as showcase the numerous inclusionary aspects of the CMSD curriculum and student support activities. Being bi-lingual, she communicated with the Spanish speaking parents and student population in their language to create a sense of caring and respect. She created an immigrant Newcomers School and Service Center to provide direction, access and assistance to community resources, health and social services for immigrant students and their families.

[REDACTED]

Her educational initiatives and innovations were many during her leadership of the Cleveland Municipal School District, all for the betterment of students and none to further her career. I mention this aspect of her leadership because in every position that she has held in education, Barbara has had to achieve great goals and initiate many successful practices in the face of resistance to change. She has always "done the right thing" for students in spite of those individuals or groups opposing moving school districts forward and clinging to past practice that do not and have not succeeded. She always did what was in the best interest of the students.

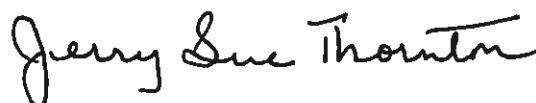
Along with viewing Dr. Byrd-Bennett from her professional position, I had the opportunity to observe and evaluate Barbara on a personal basis. I can truly attest to her sense of values, fairness, ethical behavior and character. She is a highly principled individual to whom respect has great meaning. Living her daily life with high integrity, Barbara demonstrated her respect for the value of others, the legal system and her American citizenship. Her actions and activities were clearly examples of her philosophy and commitment to be a "servant leader" and upright citizen. I strongly believe that is the true fiber of Barbara Byrd-Bennett and if allowed to continue on that pathway could do great things for the community.

Thus, I am appealing to you, Your Honor, to take into consideration the real person that is Barbara Byrd-Bennett and allow her to continue serving her community in meaningful ways. There is much more to be gained by positioning her to continue that "servant leadership" role in the community and sharing her talents and skills with those who could be greatly uplifted and enhanced by her teaching experiences and continuing commitment to skill development. At a time when preparation for the work place is so critical, the talents and experiences that she possesses could be better utilized in enriching the lives of those who perhaps have been excluded from the American Dream. There is still much work for Barbara to do and, with your support, she could continue the betterment of the Cleveland or Chicago community. There is no doubt that she is hard working, tenacious, and talented which are outstanding skills needed in working with the poor, disenfranchised and unemployed people. She could make a real difference in our communities of most need.

There is much to be gained by correctly positioning the talents and energy of those wanting to serve with the greater needs of the people; thus, I am humbly and sincerely asking that you give consideration to all of the alternatives available to you in the circumstances surrounding the future of Barbara Byrd-Bennett and the greater good.

I submit this letter with the upmost respect.

Sincerely,



Jerry Sue Thornton  
President Emerita of Cuyahoga Community College  
President of DreamCatcher Education

January 7, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor,

My name is Deborah Ward and I am a past employee, colleague and friend of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I have known Barbara for the past 18 years. In that time I have seen many aspects of Barbara's personality as a leader, friend, wife, mother, daughter, sister, and grandmother.

Despite the transgression that led her to this point, she has been an extremely kind, dependable, decent, dedicated and productive citizen. This transgression is totally out of character for Barbara.

I worked under Barbara as a principal of an urban elementary school in Cleveland, Ohio. As a principal, Barbara supported an initiative for a new playground for my students that could be accessed during the school day, evenings and weekends for the neighborhood children which provided a safe place for children to play. Her high regard for parents exceeded that of the normal CEO responsibilities. She provided and supported a parent resource center in my school where parents were able to access needed resources in order to provide for their children and families. She never said "no" to requests that would benefit children. Her passion for underprivileged children was exemplified through generous staffing and funding requests. She maintained high expectations for all students and staff. With her support I was able to move a low performing, failing elementary school to one of the highest in the District under her tenure.

Consequently, I was promoted to a principal position at a neighboring middle school. Barbara was able to mentor and develop leadership skills in me that helped to improve student achievement. With her support, we established a focus on literacy by implementing a comprehensive reading program. She funded and extended an instructional day program giving students an extended academic opportunity. She expanded a tutoring program by seeking volunteers from local universities. She provided funding for much needed facility improvements and provided necessary focused, organized opportunities for professional development. She was always available to problem solve and provide guidance and support when needed.

After continuous improvement as a middle school principal, I was promoted as an Assistant Superintendent. This position reported directly to Barbara at the central office level. In this position I was able to work with her in a more intimate professional space. I watched her ability to show compassion and genuine interest in all employees from the custodial staff to her

highest academic leaders. This compassion was not only limited to her staff, but to their families as well. One example, she secretly visited staff member's families that were hospitalized to offer support seeking no praise for her endeavors. She showed no bias and was a supporter of diversity in all aspects of the organization. She provided resources and often personal funding to support students with college tuition. It was important to her to provide young people an opportunity to go to college to further their education. A project of tremendous pride was the development of the Barbara Byrd-Bennett Fellows/Scholars at Martin Luther King High School with a partnership with Baldwin Wallace College. This project was directed towards black male students encouraging them to look beyond their current situation and enabling them to seek higher educational possibilities.

Barbara has a unique and special ability to connect with people, especially children. She not only supported her own daughter in her development but others' children as well. Her devotion to her entire family is inspiring. She is generous with her time, always dependable, responsible and ambitious to reach her goals. She is definitely a leader and has excellent scholastic accomplishments. She always proceeded with a logical and practical approach towards her endeavors. Her ability to connect with the community in order to pass vital school levy's to support students and schools was outstanding. She possesses excellent communication skills and can instantly command a room no matter how large or small.

I know Barbara has pleaded guilty to the charge. I have seen her anguish over the past year as a result of this charge. She has been incredibly remorseful for what she has done and has expressed this to me many times. I have communicated with her almost daily through phone, email, texts, and have spent personal time with her as often as possible. She has been grieving and distressed over her transgression, disgrace of her family and friends, and damaged professional reputation. I believe she is truly sorry for what she has done.

I am shocked and disappointed in her behavior as she has always been a law abiding person. I can say that this behavior is totally out of character. I have known Barbara to be a decent, respectful, hard working, loving person with a high degree of integrity. I am asking for mercy and leniency of this court when Barbara is sentenced. I pray that you will give heartfelt consideration in making the decision, and that you will take into consideration all of the good Barbara has accomplished in her life. I still feel that Barbara can make considerable, positive contributions to society.

Respectfully yours,

Deborah Ward

William Wendling



January 23, 2017

Honorable Edmond F. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor:

I write to you to offer some perspective on the personal and professional character of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. While I acknowledge that Barbara has admitted wrongdoing in a case before your Court, I wish you to know the person whom I have called friend and colleague for nearly twenty years.

I first met Barbara on the morning of November 16, 1998, in the offices of the Mayor of the City of Cleveland, Ohio, where he had convened a small group of civic leaders to introduce her as the first appointed chief executive officer of the Cleveland Municipal School District.

Many of us had worked for several years to reverse the serious decline of the District, and we had come to believe that a mayoral appointed school board and a strong chief executive were essential to improving educational outcomes for the city's 78,000 students. At the time, fewer than one-third of the students graduated from high school and only seven percent could pass the 12<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency test. Absenteeism, truancy, student discipline and staff morale were chronic problems, and the district teetered on bankruptcy.

Barbara was the change agent that the city needed. On that morning in 1998, she arrived not only with focus and the framework for dramatic improvement but also with the courage to make tough decisions.

She rebuilt trust with the teachers and their union representatives; developed meaningful partnerships with civic, business and philanthropic leaders; and supported her building principals. She was relentless in her pursuit of people willing to partner with the District. Importantly, she sought to reach out to parents and guardians and to engage with them in their neighborhoods. She was intensely personal with each parent who had a concern about their child's chances for success.

Barbara was especially driven by the need to provide learning opportunities for children with disabilities. When she arrived, she set about erasing a backlog of more than 1,000

special-needs students whose individual educational plans had not been updated, and she made certain that their classrooms had the additional resources they needed.

As Barbara settled into her role, she asked me to join her team on a full-time basis. As a member of her cabinet, I saw a person who was ardent in her belief that every child could succeed. She set high expectations for her team professionally, but also relished opportunities to spend time with them and their families. She exuded calm and confidence during periods of crisis.

Her commitment to families and students of the District was deep and personal. I was with her as she read to Billy, a young child whose family could not afford books in the home. She consoled parents while wiping away her own tears at the funerals of students who died violently. She took money from her purse to pay for the tombstone on a student's grave. She launched her own program to provide four-year college scholarships to African-American boys in Cleveland's inner city. Barbara hugged, cajoled, scolded or simply loved children into being successful.

She was a great tutor and coach, especially gifted at nurturing young people. Over the years, many of her former colleagues have gone on to significant roles in public education and civic affairs.

She built strong relationships, even with those who had opposed the transition to mayoral control. In fact, when the mayoral control measure appeared on a referendum in 2002, the measure passed with more than seventy percent approval.

When I left the school district to return to my consulting practice, I continued to have an informal relationship with Barbara. I saw her as a loving, devoted mother, spouse and, soon, a grandmother.

She was a leader in national education circles, and was instrumental in forming a unique alliance of urban school superintendents and teacher union presidents that offered collaboration rather than conflict as the way to improve learning conditions.

Most recently, I had the opportunity to work briefly with Barbara in Chicago. There I saw the same characteristics I had come to know in Cleveland – smarts, grit, determination, compassion, focus, personal sacrifice, and, above all, a conviction that "all means all" when it comes to improving the lives of students.

It has been a pleasure to know and work with Barbara. As you consider her sentencing, I urge you to consider the hundreds of thousands of young lives that have been shaped by Barbara's gifts.

Sincerely,

William Wendling



Atlanta • Chicago • Cleveland • Columbus • Los Angeles • Nashville • New York

March 8, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I write to provide a character reference for Barbara Byrd-Bennett in hopes it will show the court, ahead of sentencing, Barbara's spirit and integrity beyond the situation presently before her, to which she has pled guilty.

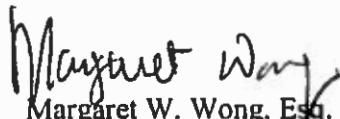
I became well acquainted with Barbara while she was CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District from 1998 to 2006. As founder of my immigration law practice, I was one of the circle of women and minority leaders who worked together on education and local civic issues. I worked with Barbara on various boards, and participated alongside her in civic functions. She was a tireless leader in diverse situations.

As an immigration lawyer, I represented the teachers of the Cleveland Municipal School District. My attorneys and I found Barbara was open and friendly, and appreciated the minutiae of arranging a foreign teacher's professional visa. This made working with the school district easier than it sometimes proves to be.

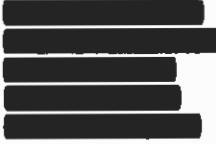
As an Asian civic leader who is also a minority woman of color, I shared another bond with Barbara. So often the conversation becomes one of race and inequality, but I always found that Barbara rose above that conversation – that she took responsibility for all the issues in her control, positive or negative, from the perspective of a leader for whom being a woman and being a woman of color were secondary, if no less important.

Barbara has worked long and hard to ensure the community is a better place. The community needs her, so please afford her a rehabilitation that takes advantage of her many gifts.

Sincerely,

  
Margaret W. Wong, Esq.  
CEO and Managing Partner

MWW Immigration Center



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January 23, 2017

Honorable Edmund E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Your Honor:

My name is Lynne Woodman, now of Bradenton, Florida. I am writing to you concerning Barbara Byrd-Bennett, whose case is before your court.

I first met Barbara in 1998, shortly after she arrived in Cleveland, Ohio to assume the position of superintendent of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. I lived in Cleveland at the time, and my husband was then working as an advisor to Barbara on District communications. I have spent time with her and been in regular communication with her ever since.

I am aware that Barbara has admitted wrongdoing and do not wish to comment on that aspect of the case. Rather, I hope to convey the enormous impact on young people that I have seen in her work and her personal life.

She always placed the well-being of the Cleveland District's children as her highest priority. She continually expressed her confidence in their intelligence, thoughtfulness and ability to succeed no matter what barriers might lie in their way. In doing so, she inspired countless children to focus on high school graduation and even to dream of college.

I have lost count of the number of times I was with her when a young person approached her – in my experience she has always been approachable, especially when a child or teenager was involved – to thank her for her influence. Shining with pride, they told her they were soon to graduate, or had entered a two-year college with the intent of later transferring to a four-year institution to complete college, or had just earned their Bachelor's degree.

"First in my family," they said. "First girl to ever graduate high school." "My mom is so proud." "I'm planning to be a teacher." "I want to work with kids like me." "I was so scared to apply for the scholarship, but you gave me the confidence I could do it."

Always, they asked if they could hug her. She always said yes.

These were kids from broken homes, or no home at all. They had grown up in poverty. All that I met were African-American or Hispanic. Several of them wrestled with learning or physical disabilities. All of them had been made to feel that they could not learn or could not succeed – except by Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

I was delighted, but not at all surprised, when I visited her in Chicago and found exactly the same reaction from young people everywhere we went in the city.

I always heard Barbara refer to the children of any district in which she worked as "my children." Her deep devotion to her family was applied equally to them. It is worth noting that, in every instance in which I was present when a young person approached her, they started the conversation the same way: "Ms. Byrd-Bennett – I'm one of your kids!"

As you consider her sentencing, I respectfully request that you take into account the many young lives she has influenced for the better, and the wealth of young people who today are, or soon will be, contributing to their families, their communities and our nation as the result of her unflagging confidence in them. Thank you.

Most sincerely yours,

Lynne E. Woodman  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

John Richard Barker, Ph.D.



January 13, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Judge Chang,

As the 25-year-plus husband to a Ph.D. microbiologist, I have a deep appreciation for and strong resonance with strong, smart, committed female leaders. From the first time I met Barbara Byrd-Bennett at a conference in San Diego in 2010 through our work together in Chicago, my admiration and appreciation for her abiding commitment to providing equitable access to high-quality education for all children continues. We determined early on that we share a rallying cry for students: "All means all." Black, brown, immigrant, high-performing, West Side, overage for grade, pre-kindergarten...when it comes to children, all means all for Barbara Byrd-Bennett and it has for her professional life of more than 40 years.

Over the three years in my role as Chief Accountability Officer for Chicago Public Schools, I had a unique vantage point to witness Barbara's passion for and commitment to children and families. I had opportunities to share news of great successes with her, like the time when student scores on the Nation's Report Card showed our fourth-grade students were outpacing their peers in large-city school districts around the nation and across school districts in Illinois, too. At other times, I had to tell her that some of our schools were not performing to her expectations. Regardless, Barbara always wanted to know the entire story, owning our gains and our shortcomings on behalf of children growing up in challenging situations like the ones she faced as a child.

Because of her love for Chicago's children and families, she agonized over the disruptions in communities brought about by closing schools, even knowing that most of the new opportunities for students would be better than the ones they left. When the data showed students who moved to "receiving schools" had better attendance, higher grades, and fewer disciplinary problems than in their previous schools, Barbara's hopes for improvement were validated, but I knew she still felt pain for the impacted neighborhoods.

I, and literally hundreds of her colleagues like me, resonated with her kind of visionary leadership that acknowledged we had substantial challenges in the district calling out for innovative solutions and tireless effort. We knew that Barbara was working day and night on behalf of children and families and that helped motivate us, as well.

For many of us aspiring to be urban superintendents someday, Barbara was a role model and mentor. She took the time to meet with several of us regularly and shared insights from her vast reservoir of experience. She gave us an intimate glimpse into the challenging life of an urban school leader, a picture that would later become clearer in light of the maxim heard from a colleague in another district that “the body and soul are not suited for long-term exposure to urban superintendency.”

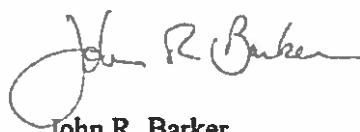
We saw Barbara practically adopt two young brothers, high school students whose turbulent home life and inconsistent social support system cried out for her intervention. Where most of us were concerned but not so committed, Barbara’s instincts drew those young men in and loved them as one who knew the importance of having caring adults in her life.

She created a Latino Advisory Committee to enhance the ongoing dialogue between the district and the growing Hispanic community. She oversaw the revision of the Student Code of Conduct and instituted new restorative justice practices that reduced suspensions and expulsions by double digits. Under her leadership, students attended school more often and performed more successfully on the ACT exam than ever before. Graduation rates, driven by increasing freshman on-track rates, continued to climb. More black and Hispanic students took AP exams, and specific curricula were developed and implemented for African and African American Studies and Latino Studies.

In short, the work she did in Chicago – work I am so honored to have been a part of – transformed the lives of children across the city. It broke my heart to learn of Barbara’s misconduct, certainly because it was so out of character for the person I knew Barbara to be, but especially because the story of how things improved in Chicago will be forever intertwined with details that have nothing to do with how Barbara’s work impacted education in the third largest school district in America. That fewer children were suspended and expelled, and likely diverted from the criminal justice system, is a fact. That more students enrolled in college because of the work she and her team did is a fact. That Chicago’s growth in student outcomes was responsible, in part, for lifting national and state data on the Nation’s Report Card is a fact. That more black and brown children across the city had increased opportunities under her leadership is a fact.

None of us is perfect, and there are surely things each of us wishes we could do over. But answering Barbara Byrd-Bennett’s call to join the work in Chicago will never be a regret for me, for exactly the reasons enumerated above. Barbara’s passion and commitment for improving opportunities for students in Chicago, a city not even her hometown or adopted hometown, truly showed me that “all means all” for her, regardless of labels that anyone would use to qualify.

Sincerely,



John R. Barker

[REDACTED]

January 17, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I write this letter in my personal capacity as a parent and a member of the public, and after much forethought and careful consideration. I am aware of the potential consequences as well as the magnitude of the sentencing decision which you will soon make with respect to Barbara Byrd-Bennett. Notwithstanding other requests over the years, this is the first letter of this kind that I have ever written. It is important to tell you at the outset that Barbara did not ask me for a letter of support and in fact seemed embarrassed and distressed when she became aware that I intended to write to you. I fully understand the importance of the decision that you are about to make and assume that you want as much useful information as possible to guide and inform you as you mete out justice in this case.

In light of the crime that she committed I think it is important to tell you about Barbara's character (which is not reflective of the person who committed the crime for which she will soon be sentenced). On the contrary, Barbara's character bespeaks a life-long commitment to children and education, especially in underserved communities. Also of great importance to me is the fact that Barbara is *extremely remorseful, and fully accepting of responsibility for her actions*. It was this remorse and acceptance of responsibility that motivated me to write this letter to you. It has been my experience that defendants often make excuses and attempt to explain their behavior in ways that shift the focus away from their guilt and personal responsibility. It is a refreshing change to see Barbara express a deep level of remorse and an even deeper understanding of the impact of the crime that she committed. Her emotion and acceptance of personal responsibility were so raw and genuine that it moved me to share this with you as the sentencing judge. In fact, I believe it will be useful in the future for her to share her thoughts and lessons learned with others. In so doing, they might benefit from hearing her unvarnished, pragmatic, remorseful view regarding her experience and how this misconduct came about, perhaps saving them from the same disastrous path.

Barbara and I come from similar circumstances. She is from an immigrant family that came to this country to find better opportunities. She excelled in school, personally and professionally. Indeed, she personified the American dream and until the commission of this lapse in judgment,

she fulfilled the promise of opportunities afforded her. She has paved the way for women, children and families who find themselves on the wrong side of the economic and educational grid. The stories of her personal involvement in seemingly inconsequential events, which nevertheless impacted poor children, are many. As an administrator, she was a hands-on problem solver for many problems ranging from a bullying issue in a particular school to helping committed teachers cut through bureaucratic red tape to get the resources and equipment they needed to teach challenged children in a blighted public school.

Barbara assumed leadership of the Chicago Public School system at a critical time in its troubled history. Students, parents, teachers and administrators were skeptical and distrusting of CPS hierarchy. There was widespread belief that the leaders were out of touch not only with the schools but also the human side of the problems which ordinary people face daily. Barbara was able to gain the trust and respect of students, parents, and administrators in a relatively short period of time. She quickly established a reputation for understanding the issues and showing that she cared about the children. The way I met Barbara exemplifies who she is and why she was effective. Unlike her predecessors, when Barbara became CEO of the Chicago Public School system she made a concerted effort to reach out to community groups and professional organizations which had historically never interacted with CPS. It was her vision that the public school system belonged to everyone and her goal was to engage the public in understanding the system and helping to find solutions to problems. At the forums she initiated, she invited members of the audience to contact her with school related issues. After attending such a meeting, I contacted Barbara regarding a problem at the school which my son attended. I did so as a parent who wanted her help in resolving a problem. She was responsive and expressed a genuine interest in helping to resolve the problem. This was unprecedented for a CPS leader and impressed me as a parent.

Her encouragement to parents and school administrators coupled with practical suggestions for resolving issues in particular schools made her a heroine to many. People began to feel that there was someone in the CPS hierarchy who cared about them. One school principal told me that "it's the first time anyone at CPS ever bothered to try to figure out our problem, let alone try to help us fix it." As a parent of a CPS student at the time, it was important to me to have witnessed her concern and efforts in a way that was uncharacteristic of CPS leadership. This is the Barbara that I know; a woman concerned about the well being of the children in our schools. In her focus on helping children and families in underserved communities she tried to show them that no matter how disadvantaged they may be, education is the key to a better life. Indeed, her track record of developing programs which benefit some of the poorest schools in the public system underscores that philosophy.

I understand the gravity of the sentencing decision and its many components. In my view, it is important for you to know that away from the public eye and the court, Barbara continues to accept full responsibility for her actions and shows a level of remorse that I believe is indicative of her true character. This is a woman who has dedicated her life to doing good things for children and families. I can only say that the person who committed this crime is uncharacteristic of the Barbara Byrd-Bennett that I know.

While no one gets a pass when it comes to crime, I ask you to take into consideration the life-long "good character" of this woman and recognize this crime for the aberration that it is in the scope of her life, and the good that she has done. In my view and observation, the rehabilitation component of sentencing has already occurred. I recognize the value of brevity so while I could say more, I will end by reiterating that I would never undertake to write this letter without a profound belief in Barbara's character and her life-long commitment to improving the lives of children through education. She committed a crime and has taken full responsibility. This is who she is. Understanding that her fate is in your hands, I will close by saying that justice is not devoid of mercy.

Respectfully yours,



Joy Virginia Cunningham

Ms. Aarti Dhupelia  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

January 5, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

RE: Barbara Byrd-Bennett

Dear Judge Chang:

My name is Aarti Dhupelia, and I am currently the Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at National Louis University, where I work on undergraduate programming that serves students from across the Chicagoland area, including a large number of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) graduates. Prior to my current position, I worked in the CPS central office for eight years (2007-2015) in several leadership roles. I am writing this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett, whom I understand will appear before you for sentencing after having pleaded guilty to a felony charge. I have known Barbara since mid-2012, when I first began reporting to her at CPS. Barbara was my direct supervisor at CPS until her resignation in 2015 – during her time as CEO, I served as Deputy Chief of Staff, and then as Chief Officer for the Office of College and Career Success – and I have had the chance to get to know her on a professional and personal level.

I consider Barbara a mentor and friend, and I consider her someone who has done a lot of good in her life. I do not condone the conduct that has brought Barbara before you, and I know she has pled guilty and accepts that her conduct warrants a certain level of punishment; yet, I write this letter to share my view of the “whole person” that is the Barbara whom I know, as I hope that the decisions regarding her sentencing take into account her whole self and her whole life’s contributions. My hope is that through this letter and others that you may receive, you see the person who is dedicated to her family and who has made tremendous contributions to young people in the 40+ years she has worked in education, specifically in urban school districts serving predominantly low-income students.

What comes to mind first when I think of Barbara is her true, deep care for students, especially the neediest students. I accompanied her on many school and community visits and, every time, I saw her genuinely light up from the first moment she spotted a young person. I saw her drawn to students, talking with them, laughing with them, listening to them – and at times, even going back and re-visiting students with whom she made a connection. I saw her take two young men from one of our high schools under her wing. These two brothers faced challenging personal and financial circumstances and had not been getting sufficient support from their high school; so, Barbara made it her personal mission to ensure they did not fall through the cracks. She set up tutoring services for them to ensure they graduated on-time, packed a trunk of essentials for the older brother when he left for college, and personally stayed in touch with both brothers to keep tabs on how they were doing – and I recall her mentioning that they even

referred to her as “gramma.” I saw Barbara build the CEO’s Student Advisory Council, and I recall how she was adamant about ensuring representation from high schools across the district, not only to keep her ear to the ground through building direct connections with students from neighborhoods across the city, but also so that she could personally contribute to the leadership development of CPS students from all backgrounds through her own engagement with them. And I saw her captivate students on this council with the stories she told and motivate them with her words of encouragement. I recall one particular council meeting where a student shared out about the challenges of growing up undocumented, and this student began crying uncontrollably and went to the bathroom to pull herself together. Out of all the adults in the room, Barbara was the first to follow this student out of the room to try to console her. In a district of nearly 400,000 students and over 600 schools, Barbara’s personal touch with so many students was not an easy feat; but, it was both natural and essential to her, and a core part of her leadership.

Barbara’s genuine care for students in turn drove a relentless work ethic in herself. As CPS’ CEO, Barbara personally kept a grueling schedule, starting early and finishing late every day, with emails and phone calls continuing far beyond “traditional” work hours – she seemed to be the hardest working person in central office, which heightened the sense of urgency in her team and sharpened her team’s focus on student success. She furthermore made significant strides in breaking down long-standing silos in the bureaucracy by encouraging teams to work across school/region/central office lines, and by actively seeking and responding to feedback from all levels of the organization – teachers, principals, regional leaders, and central office staff – as well as from parents and broader community constituents. While facing the many difficult decisions regarding school consolidations, I recall Barbara personally reading through hundreds of pages of meeting notes from community feedback sessions regarding each and every school because she wanted to learn first-hand what challenges each potential closure might create for students and families. She took seriously the magnitude of these decisions and paid close personal attention to the details as she wanted to ensure a careful and thoughtful decision-making process. I also recall when I and one of my team members presented at Barbara’s weekly Cabinet meeting on the issue of racial disparities in how students were being disciplined across the district – with African American and Hispanic students being suspended and expelled at a much higher rate than Caucasian students in response to similar types of misbehavior – and after reviewing the data she immediately made it a top priority for our leadership team to address this issue, given the significant impact that she knew this issue would have on our students’ near- and long-term success, and given the social justice imperative at the core of this issue. The result was a massive endeavor in which we gathered feedback from educators and community members across the city and developed a plan that reduced the number of student suspensions and expulsions by thousands in the following year and beyond. This was difficult and ground-breaking work, and work that many other districts have avoided dealing with, and it was an example of Barbara pushing for what was right for students even when it was not easy.

From a student outcomes standpoint, suspension and expulsion rates were one of many areas where we saw quantifiable improvements under Barbara’s tenure as CEO. Attendance rates, test scores, freshmen on-track rates, and high school graduation rates all grew – and in some cases, these results demonstrated rates of improvement far exceeding those of other districts across the state. Certainly, credit for this growth must be given to CPS students, their families, and the teachers, principals, and school staff who support them; yet, sustained system-wide improvements in these areas during a time when the district was dealing with so many structural and budgetary challenges required a deep and broad district-wide focus on student success, which I believe that Barbara led and drove through the culture that she built.

Beyond her impact on student outcomes, I believe that Barbara had a lasting impact through the development of many of her CPS team members. She has said on many occasions that she believes leadership development is at the core of driving improvement in education systems, and I believe that as a result she personally invested herself in motivating and cultivating leaders in her organization. I have encountered principals who have commented on how she inspired them and how they looked up to her. I

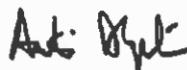
have heard from fellow central office staffers about the unique passion, energy, and motivation she brought that they miss. One of my personal greatest recollections is regarding a group of approximately ten of us at central office who had shared with Barbara our career goal of potentially being superintendents in the future. Despite the many demands on her schedule, Barbara voluntarily set aside time to create a number of informal two-hour superintendent training sessions specifically just for us over the course of several months. During these sessions she shared stories and lessons learned from her own experiences, we discussed relevant articles, she shared her "recommended books to read" list, and we had the opportunity to pick her brain about whatever burning questions we had about the superintendent role. I remember my fellow colleagues and me remarking that the time we shared with her felt like uncovering a "pot of gold" because of the wisdom we were able to hear firsthand from someone who had been through so much – and accomplished so much – in education. I believe that Barbara's investment in her team came from her true care for the people around her as well as her commitment to developing a generation of leaders to follow her.

The final aspect of Barbara I would highlight is what I believe is at the core of her character, which is her commitment to her family and her faith. During her time at CPS, she spoke constantly and proudly about her twin grandsons, her daughter, her parents, and her husband. She travelled often to be near them, and it was clear the deep bond shared between all of them. And I recall her often referring to her faith – her regular visits to church and her daily prayer – as her guiding force through the obstacles she encountered. While she stands before you now having stumbled on her path, I believe that family and faith remain central to Barbara's life today and will help to guide her path going forward, and that she, too, will play an active role as a positive force in the lives of her family members.

Your Honor, with these positive aspects of Barbara's character and impact in mind, it remains difficult for me to reconcile the Barbara I know with the guilty plea that brings her before you. I recognize the gravity of the misconduct and remain shocked and saddened by it. I also know that the positive impact Barbara had on so many students and staff at CPS exacerbated the sense of shock and betrayal that many people felt toward her when she admitted guilt. Yet, as you determine her sentencing, I hope that Barbara's guilty plea is considered alongside her life's work – work that was never just a job for her, but that was personal for her, that was her passion, that was driven by positive intentions and a commitment to community, and that was something to which she gave so much talent, energy, and heart. While I do not know what the future holds for Barbara, I do know that she has more to give her family and her community should she be given the opportunity to do so.

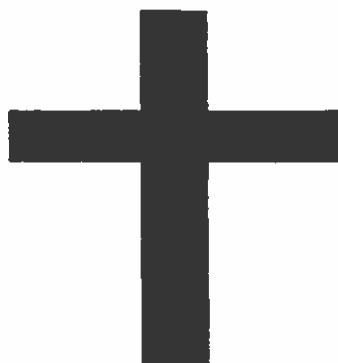
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Aarti Dhupelia

Isiah Doss Ministries • [REDACTED]



WE ARE, BECAUSE HE IS!

[www.isiahdossministries.com](http://www.isiahdossministries.com)

Date: 11/17/16

**Re: Barbara Byrd-Bennett**

**To Whom It May Concern:**

I was initially impressed with Barbara Byrd-Bennett's enthusiasm, communication skills and professional demeanor when I first had the chance to be graced by her presence. Ms. Byrd-Bennett came to "Chicago Public Schools" and helped our student's tremendously. Chicago Public Schools has been soaring since the leadership of Ms. Byrd-Bennett took affect. One great thing Ms. Byrd-Bennett has done for our schools, students and communities to prevent school closings is a better rating system for our school.

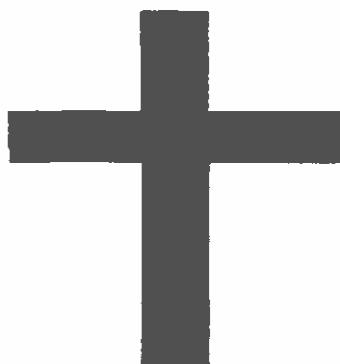
Taking a school system that has numerous challenges and turning those challenges positive is not a easy task. As the Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools Barbara Byrd-Bennett went above and beyond her duties as CEO. The students are leaving Chicago Public Schools well prepared for college and ready to soar into a career of their choice. The mission of Chicago Public Schools is for students to engage in a rigorous instructional academic program such as S.T.E.M.

I highly consider Mrs. Byrd-Bennett one of the best Chief Executive Officer's "Chicago Public Schools" has had. Just recently before she resigned from CPS she was helping with an ongoing problem within a CPS school. She did everything she could in her power to make sure this situation was solved. The high professionalism she showed during the ongoing situation. Since the resigning of Mrs. Byrd-Bennett I have yet to hear from any CPS personnel about the situation I have reached out to numerous people about the situation.

Sincerely,

*Isiah D. Doss  
Ambassador*

Isiah Doss Ministries • [REDACTED]



WE ARE, BECAUSE HE IS!

[www.isiahdossministries.com](http://www.isiahdossministries.com)

**Isiah D. Doss  
Ambassador  
Isiah Doss Ministries**

*Isiah D. Doss  
Ambassador*

January 4, 2017

Dear Honorable Judge Chang,

My name is Dalia Denise Flores Contreras, and I currently serve as Chief of Staff for KIPP San Antonio Public Charter Schools. I have served in education for almost 20 years with a commitment to positively impacting the lives of children, adults and the community in which I dwell. I am a first generation Mexican-American, the first to graduate from high school and college and the first to set a new course of high expectations and success for my immediate family. God, hard work, determination and my community have helped me become who I am today.

During the 2012-2013 school year I was serving as an Assistant Deputy Chief for the Pershing Network in Chicago Public Schools. Towards the end of that school year I interviewed and was promoted to serve as the Chief of Staff to the Chief Officer of the Office of Teaching and Learning. It was during my summer transition to this role that I met Barbara Byrd-Bennett, and through both her and my departure from Chicago Public Schools we've kept in touch to this very day. I am aware that Barbara has admitted to wrongdoing, and write this letter in order to share my personal experiences and knowledge of Barbara's personal and professional character.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett's tenure in Chicago Public Schools brought about incredible change for the district. Barbara came to Chicago Public Schools (CPS) with a wealth of knowledge, experience and past success. It was the first time, in a long time, that an educator was leading the district. Her background allowed her to be a tremendously effective leader because she knew exactly what to ask, where to look, where to push, what excellence looks like and how to guide an organization towards greatness. Personally, it was her knowledge, leadership and commitment that motivated me to stay in an organization that needed so much change.

Large, urban school districts serve some of the nation's most challenging communities and provide services to some our neediest children. Barbara was well aware of that as CEO, and the actions she took during her tenure illustrate her commitment to providing rich learning experiences and an opportunity for hopes and dreams to come true. Barbara established a task-force to identify and search for "CPS's Lost Children". These were children who had fallen through the cracks of the system or dropped out. Barbara made sure to establish a sense of ownership and accountability for these children, and as a result hundreds were identified and supported either back into school or into a program that could allow them to acquire a GED and/or pathway to a brighter future. Barbara was also a strong advocate for Safe Havens and worked diligently with the community and Faith Based partners to increase the number of seats available. These seats allowed students to have a safe place to learn, grow and receive a meal during times which this would likely be a challenge for them (after school, holiday breaks and the summer). Barbara led the district in adopting restorative practices which resulted in drastic decreases in the number of expulsions and suspensions of children. This was of monumental importance especially seeing that these were our most vulnerable children and for who every day in school counts that much more. Barbara also led the district in starting the first ever district-wide mentoring initiative referred to as Mentoring Chicago's Next Generation. Through this initiative, hundreds of at-risk kinder and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students where were paired with a caring, committed adult who provided weekly guidance and support. This initiative had a huge impact not only for the children but also the adults who, as a result of this experience, now had a renewed focus and commitment to their work in the organization.

Chicago Public Schools is a large, complex organization that has for the past 5-7 years faced incredible obstacles and challenges. It is extremely difficult to recruit and retain high-quality staff who are willing to commit to the challenge and roll-up their sleeves to do the difficult work needed to support a district like CPS. Barbara was an extremely influential, motivational, inspiring and caring leader. Because of these qualities she was able to attract and retain great talent in the organization. Barbara established many systems and structures in the organization needed to attract and retain the caliber staff she needed to engage in deep, strategic shifts. For example, Barbara initiated quarterly all-staff meetings which helped to break down organizational walls, increase communication and transparency, build culture and team. During

these meetings Barbara leveraged and empowered a variety of team members through collective planning and facilitation. She regularly poured her heart out and connected the organization to the compelling “why” of our work resulting in great buy-in and commitment to persevere and succeed on behalf of children. Barbara established a routine practice of identifying and celebrating CPS Heroes. During each quarterly all-staff meeting a new Hero was unveiled and celebrated. Though this practice, team members who were doing great work on behalf of children were celebrated and honored. This allowed for the highlight and celebration of many great team members who were before lost in the shadows of our organization. This helped to motivate others to strive for excellence on behalf of children.

Barbara valued the voice of the client and key stakeholders and ensured that she had direct access to them by establishing advisory councils. She developed a student, school leader and Latino advisory council to the CEO. Through regular engagement of the stakeholders in these councils, Barbara was able to establish strong relationships, maintain an ear to the ground and gain valuable information that guided her leadership of the central office teams as well as improvements to the district as a whole. One thing I always deeply appreciated about Barbara was that she regularly shared her personal experiences. The vulnerability, transparency and willingness to share was extremely motivating and inspiring to others, and also helped to create a sense of understanding and empathy for the struggles of underserved children.

Barbara made sure the organization made right on its wrongs. She learned of two brothers who were struggling in one of our high schools. These two boys were extremely bright, talented basketball players academically in school. For these two boys an athletic scholarship was their ticket to a college degree and brighter future, however as a system we had failed to provide adequate and timely wrap-around supports to ensure their success. When Barbara learned of their struggle she made a personal commitment to help them catch up with credits, graduate high school and receive full-paid scholarships to college. Their life trajectory was drastically changed due to her willingness to right the organization’s wrongs.

One of the most difficult realities of working for CPS was the number of children who passed away monthly. For some the reasons were health related but for many they were related to violence and crime. Barbara made sure to personally call every family who ever lost a child while she was the CEO. These calls were always difficult, lengthy and tasking BUT she always called. She never gave this work to someone else but rather kept it close and did it every time. This meant a lot to many families who were going through a very difficult time.

Chicago Public Schools was such a large organization that it really took a village of smart, committed individuals to be successful. Barbara knew that talent cannot only be attracted, it also needs to be cultivated from within. During Barbara’s tenure she modeled for others a commitment to identifying and empowering leaders in the organization.

Barbara had a great eye for talent, especially individuals with potential who needed investment and growth to meet their full potential. I was one of those people and Barbara created a space for me and others like me to dream and grow. Barbara created a Leadership PLC and invited 10-15 aspiring leaders to meet with her monthly in order to dream, learn and grow together. To this day, I lean on take-aways from conversations and learnings from these meetings. Barbara also took the time to identify CPS Principals who had experienced great success in the role. These principals were provided with extremely impactful professional development through a top-notch university, they had access to monthly intimate learning communities with Barbara, and had the chance to take on the support and coaching of school leaders at our most struggling schools. This pairing allowed for leaders of some of Chicago’s most struggling schools to receive personalized guidance and support to turn their schools around. This type of creative and innovative school support structure had never existed in CPS, and it had a tremendous impact on the Fellow who was able to spread their influence and reach to a low performing school as well as for the principal of the low performing school who now had a strong coach, mentor and thought partner.

Barbara deeply understood that struggling schools need deep, rich learning experiences and supports that they were not receiving via their local networks. Because of that, Barbara created a network specifically focused on supporting the districts most struggling schools. Schools in this network were provided with the level of support and guidance needed to turn their schools around—most of which did.

Barbara led the organization into a culture of high expectations and accountability that helped turn the district in a positive direction. Through Barbara's leadership she nudged cabinet and many leaders in the organization to reflect upon the quality and impact of current professional learning experiences, tools and resources in order to identify strengths and areas of improvement. Through this nudge, a complete revamp of professional learning, tools and resources was accomplished. This change brought about great motivation in teachers and leaders who were extremely frustrated with years of poorly planned, executed and developed tools. This change also better prepared and supported teachers and leaders to do their best work on behalf of the children of Chicago. During Barbara's tenure she also worked to establish a more effective and accurate school quality rating system which brought about a level of accuracy and fairness to how the district was measuring school success. Through this process the district was able to better identify struggling schools in order to provide immediate support, as well as identify highly effective schools to celebrate and leverage in order to improve the district as a whole.

Barbara truly served the children, teachers, leaders, parents and community of Chicago Public Schools. Through her tenure there she identified and worked diligently to positively impact change in critical areas: serving the underserved, motivating and inspiring the district, empowering leaders, and creating a culture of high expectations and accountability. She managed to do all of this with a warm smile and a caring heart. Although she nudged the organization in many ways and created great change, she was able to do it while also building a strong team and motivating others to bring their best self and do their best work on behalf of children. This work was not easy, and as we dug into the organization we found more and more work to do. However, working for a leader like Barbara made it fun, important and doable.

On a personal level, I attribute much of my success and effectiveness as a leader to the investment Barbara made in growing my skillset. It is because of her investment in me as a leader that KIPP San Antonio's students, teachers, leaders and community are able to benefit from my work here. I will forever be grateful to having had the opportunity to work, learn and grow alongside Barbara.

Today I continue to serve as an educational leader and am thankful to Barbara for her support and heart. The Barbara that I know is kind, generous, selfless, caring and good intentioned. Barbara is a family oriented, woman of faith and someone that has positively impacted me as a person and leader.

I cannot imagine the heaviness of your work and thank you in advance for taking time to read this letter. Please reach out if you have any questions – [REDACTED]

Humbly,

Dalia Denise Flores Contreras  
(Former Colleague and Friend of Barbara Byrd-Bennet)



CC: Attorney Flath

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lara.flath@skadden.com

Annette D. Gurley



October 13, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 S. Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

Greetings, Judge Chang:

My name is Annette Gurley. I am a recent retiree of the Chicago Public School (CPS) System (August 2016), where I served as Chief Officer for the Office of Teaching and Learning. I was appointed to that office by then CEO, Barbara Byrd-Bennett in December 2012. As Chief Officer of Teaching and Learning, I served on the CEO's cabinet, and reported directly to Barbara Byrd-Bennett as a member of her Academic Leadership Team. In the capacity of my work, I regularly interacted with Mrs. Byrd-Bennett, and observed her interactions with others. What I can report seeing is Barbara's strong humanitarian spirit, her ability to mediate inner office conflict to create a collaborative working environment, her ability to problem-solve and communicate personably with people of different backgrounds, and her commitment to equitable supports and services for students, teachers, and principals.

I first witnessed Barbara's quest for equity and her humanitarian spirit when the district was faced with closing 50 underutilized school buildings during the 2013-14 school year. Most, if not all, of these schools were in underserved African American communities, and the closures meant that students would, in many cases, have to travel farther to a "receiving school" once their local schools closed. This travel often took students across major thoroughfares that separated communities and sometimes gang territories. Ms. Byrd-Bennett charged cabinet members with researching and identifying the threats that could result in detriment to the social-emotional well-being and/or safety of the students. She directed both the Academic Team and the Operations Team of her cabinet to problem-solve to ensure that social-emotional supports were provided for all closing and receiving school families. Additionally, working with local ministers, community leaders and the CPS Office of Safety and Security, the Safe Passage Team was created. The Safety and Security team worked with the Police Department to identify the safest routes for students to travel, and assigned Safe Passage workers along the routes as students walked to and from school each day. The CEO also included in her budget funding for school-level welcoming activities to merge the school staff and families from "closing and receiving" schools.

Barbara created a collaborative work environment by conducting joint weekly meetings with the operations and academic team administrators. These meetings allowed for regular input and cross-collaborative conversations for informed decision-making. Similarly, the CEO communicated the expectation that all chief officers require their departments to collaborate with each other to share plans and ideas. This practice was called, "Working the Wheel", and it was mandatory before making recommendations and presentations to the cabinet and CEO. It created an inclusive work climate, where all input was respectfully received.

Barbara demonstrated understanding of the nuances of working with people at all levels of the organization. She took time to greet doormen, receptionists, and custodial staff by name, and would often engage in conversations with them regarding their well-being and their families. She consistently demonstrated the skill of listening and remembering previous casual conversations, and would follow up in future encounters to touchback on matters of interests that were shared with her.

Barbara realized that she and her Cabinet could not be successful in leading our district's work without the commitment and support of the various directors and managers, who guide their teams to provide the boots on the ground implementation and follow-up for the district's initiatives. She recognized the importance of keeping staff informed and implemented "At the Water Cooler", a monthly face-to-face meeting that included chiefs, directors, managers, and coordinators. These meetings highlighted the work of various departments and provided opportunities for all participants to engage by asking questions of the CEO about anything they had heard/seen, or were interested in learning more about. These meetings were also used to recognize and celebrate talent. Barbara Byrd-Bennett established the CEO's Hero Award to publically acknowledge little known, but deserving staff members, for excellence in performance.

What is not widely known or seen is the personal interest that CEO Byrd-Bennett took in making a positive impact on the lives of students, who many might describe as "At-Risk", students with challenges, who came to her attention during school visits or talks with school leaders. One example is my observation of Barbara taking interest in the lives of two high school student athletes, who excelled on the basketball court, but were not demonstrating academic excellence. Both boys (brothers), were upper classmen in danger of not graduating with their graduating class. CEO Byrd-Bennett took a personal interest and had members of the Academic Team evaluate the students' transcripts, talk with school counselors, coaches, as well as the parent, then plot a course of action using traditional and virtual coursework to help both brothers meet the requirement for graduation and post-secondary schooling. The plan entailed the boys reporting to Central Office daily after their regular school day, where they completed virtual courses under the supervision of a certified high school teacher on the Academic Team, who graciously extended his work day to serve as a mentor. The CEO personally purchased daily meals for the boys, and checked on their progress regularly. Each of the brothers successfully completed the coursework for graduation with their graduating class.

I am aware that Barbara Byrd-Bennett, Former CEO for Chicago Public Schools, has admitted to wrongdoing. Let me be perfectly clear that the intent of this letter is share the positive character traits that I saw exhibited by Barbara. This letter is in no way intended to condone any act of misconduct to which Ms. Byrd-Bennett has admitted.

Thank you,

  
Annette Gurley

October 16, 2016

Dear Judge Chang,

Our names are Joshua and Joseph Stamps and we are writing this letter on behalf of Mrs. Barbara Byrd-Bennett. We met Mrs. Bennett in March 2014 when she was the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, and we were in our 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of high school, respectively. While most students never got the opportunity to meet the CEO, we got to meet her because of a set of unfortunate circumstances.

They say people come into your life for a reason. Ms. Bennett came into our lives to save us. We met Ms. Bennett on the Monday after our high school basketball team won the City Championship Varsity Basketball Game. However, she didn't come to congratulate us, she came to tell our team that the Championship Game had to be forfeited, and the Championship Trophy taken away. She had to deliver this bad news because we, Joshua and Joseph Stamps, were not academically eligible to play in the Championship Game. In fact, we weren't academically eligible the entire school year, despite having played in every game. Immediately after she delivered the news, we did not like Ms. Bennett., and had nothing good to say about her. We felt like her decision was unfair. We didn't care that we should not have been playing in the games. We felt like her decision was unfair because we knew that there were ineligible players on every team. Academically ineligible players played all the time. We didn't understand why she was picking on us. Never in a Million years did we imagine that we would ever write her a letter of support.

A couple of days after she met with the team, Ms. Bennett called for us to come downtown to her office separately, without the rest of the team. She wanted to know our story. She asked us about our home lives and really wanted to know why we had fallen so far behind in our credits to graduate. We explained to her, like we had explained to many others, about how we were living in poverty. We were being raised by a single mother. We didn't have carfare to get to school or food to eat most days, and had faced the deaths of our uncle, grandmother and great grandmother within a span of four years. However, the difference between Ms. Bennett and the others was that Ms. Bennett actually listened. She seemed like she actually cared. After the meeting, she bought us dinner and told us that she would be in touch with us because she wanted to help us get on track and graduate. We were grateful for the dinner, but we didn't expect to ever hear from her again. We were wrong.

A couple of days later, she sent a man and a lady from downtown to meet with us at our school. Before they met with us, they had met with all of our teachers to determine what we needed to do to pass our classes for the semester. When they met with us, they presented Ms. Bennett's plan to help us get

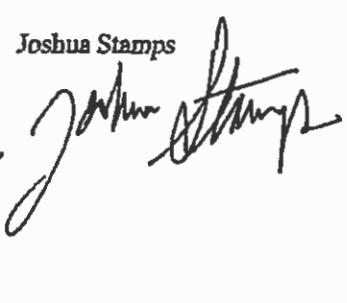
back on track. The plan consisted of us coming downtown to the office to be tutored in our current classes, and to take on-line credit recovery classes. Ms. Bennett gave us bus cards to get to school and downtown every day. Also, she made sure that we ate every day. At first, we came downtown Monday through Friday after school. However, after about two weeks, we realized that Ms. Bennett really did care about us. We wanted to impress her and make her proud, so we started coming downtown 7 days a week to study and recover classes. Before we knew it, we were passing our current classes and making up many of the courses that we had failed. She got to know us and our family personally. Both of us had to complete an extra summer to graduate from high school, but we did it. WE WOULDN'T HAVE MADE IT WITHOUT HER. When we went away to college, Ms. Bennett made sure that we had everything we needed for college. We have continued to stay in close contact with her and we communicate with her several times a week. Despite all that she is dealing with right now, she still manages to have time to support us.

We have come to affectionately call Ms. Bennett, "Grandma," because that's what she's been to us. She never knew it, but we had already planned to drop out of school after the Championship Game, because we knew that we were too far behind to graduate. We had other plans. "Grandma" made sure that we did not get to complete those plans. We completed the plan she had for us instead. Although we probably are not where we should be in life, we are much farther than we would have been if "Grandma" had not stepped up to help us.

We know that nothing we can do or say can turn back the hands of time or undo anything that's been done. But, we had to take the time to write a letter to support the woman who has provided so much support to us. After the Championship was taken, the story was all over the news and in the paper. However, after a few weeks, the stories disappeared and no one cared. No one cared except Barbara Byrd-Bennett, because that's the type of person she is. The biggest lesson she taught us was to accept responsibility for our actions. That is why we were proud when she accepted responsibility for hers. While we don't really understand what happened with this case and why it happened. We do understand that she has accepted responsibility for her part in it. There are many different sides to a person's character, and we want the Court to know this side of Ms. Bennett's All that we ask, Your Honor, is that you seriously consider our story and how Ms. Barbara Byrd-Bennett changed our lives.

Sincerely,

Joseph Stamps



Joshua Stamps

January 27, 2017

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

Thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts and observations about Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I have known Barbara for nearly 20 years, first as a newspaper reporter covering the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and later as her executive director of strategic communications in the Chicago Public Schools. I have observed her career closely, and I believe my experiences give me a unique perspective on her life, her work and her character.

I first met Barbara when she was hired in Cleveland and introduced to the community at what was then called Miles Standish Elementary School. Away from the clamor of dignitaries and television cameras, I spotted a woman in the corner, coiffed and well-dressed, kneeling to speak with a tiny girl who appeared to be having a bad day. While the mayor and others waited, Barbara visited with that child, gave her a hug, wiped away her tears and assured her that whatever was bothering her would pass in time. It was a scene I would see replayed with children—her “little pumpkins,” as she called them—many times during Barbara’s seven years in Cleveland.

Prior to her arrival in Cleveland, I traveled to New York City to report on Barbara’s work there. As the first superintendent of the city’s Chancellor’s District, Barbara was in charge of the city’s most academically challenged schools and its most economically disadvantaged students. In Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, East Harlem and other neighborhoods, parents, teachers and administrators spoke reverently of her work and all of the good she was doing. Barbara was an advocate for “wrap-around services”—meeting the social, emotional and medical needs of a child—long before it became fashionable. Once in Cleveland, Barbara inherited a struggling district that had been under state control after decades of turmoil and failure. With a steady hand, she forged measurable and significant improvements in every quantifiable academic area. It was a formula she would repeat in Chicago, where the graduation rate, test scores and college persistence rate soared under her stewardship.

But what has impressed me most about Barbara, your honor, were not test scores and data, but rather her unwavering commitment to the children and families she served. Her life and work have literally touched thousands of young people. Some became lawyers and doctors; others became carpenters and hip-hop artists. But because of her, the vast majority grew into adults who are not only educated and productive citizens, but are also decent human beings. Few of us can claim such a rich and meaningful legacy.

Somewhere in New York City, there is a former student of Barbara’s who reads to her own children because she had a teacher who instilled in her a love of books and literature. Somewhere in Cleveland, there is a man who works as a security guard during the day and writes poetry at night because she told him to never stop dreaming. Somewhere in Chicago, there are two brothers

who were headed for trouble but are now pursuing college degrees because Barbara personally "adopted" them and convinced them that they would not only survive, but that they would excel.

While Barbara cares about all children, she has shown a special preference for the least among us. She always took the time to sit with the shy, befriend the awkward, or console the angry. For her, those children were always entitled to just a little bit more. If she took heat for giving resources to the neediest students at the perceived expense of "gifted," it's because Barbara has always believed that all of her students are gifted, whether they struggled to read at grade level or aced high-level physics. If she was criticized by some for softening disciplinary policies, it's because she believed the mission of schools was education and redemption, not punishment and expulsion. Her commitment to equity, in education and in society, is real and deep: more than once, I have seen her fight back tears as she discussed students who faced long odds because of their skin color, the neighborhood they came from or the size of their parents' bank accounts. Most of us bemoan these inequities; Barbara rolled up her sleeves and did something about them.

When I was offered an opportunity to work with Barbara, my wife and I uprooted our lives and left a very good job in Washington, D.C., to join her in Chicago. We were not alone. Because of her tireless work ethic and almost evangelical devotion to her students, Barbara attracted many of the best and brightest educators in the country. Today, those of us who worked for Barbara and learned from her are making a difference in the lives of students across the country. In Ohio alone, two of her protégés became superintendents in districts that had faced serious challenges, but are now turning around and succeeding. In a very real sense, Barbara's work is continuing, and children who will never meet her are benefiting from her vision and good work.

Your honor, my life is richer for my friendship and relationship with Barbara Byrd-Bennett. More important, so are the lives of thousands of students, families and educators. I am honored to speak on her behalf, and grateful to you for giving me the chance to do so.

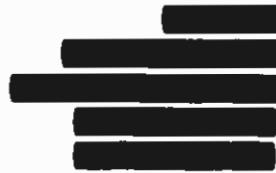
Sincerely,

Scott Stephens

[REDACTED]



The Robert Bobb Group, LLC



[www.robertbobbgroup.com](http://www.robertbobbgroup.com)

March 6, 2017

Honorable Edmund E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

RE: Barbara Byrd Bennett

Dear Judge Chang:

Your Honor, my name is Robert C. Bobb.

I met Barbara Bennett in May, 2009, when I was the Emergency Financial manager (EFM) for the Detroit Public Schools System. My engagement was the financial turnaround of the Detroit Public Schools. In that capacity I, and the experts who worked with me, realized the critical need to add a seasoned public school education expert to our team. We required someone with experience in ground level work as well as expert technical knowledge and a broad philosophical perspective. It was important that this educator be someone who was intimately familiar those urban districts wherein the majority of students were eligible for assistance programs; such as the "free and reduced Lunch" program. After considering the recommendations of many national school and financial experts, and some of my most respected advisors, I contacted Barbara Byrd Bennett. I hired Barbara as my Chief Academic Auditor.

Your Honor, Barbara affirmed her reputation as one of the most dedicated public school educators in our country, today. Child advocacy was her priority. Throughout her work with us, Barbara was resolute in her intolerance of those who did not place children first. I can, from personal observation, attest to the sincerity and quality of her interactions with students, parents, educators and the community. Her work ethics were beyond reproach.

Barbara made a lasting contribution to the Detroit Public Schools, not only in her mentoring of many teachers and school administrators, but her development of a Master Education Plan which focused specifically on 21<sup>st</sup>. Century Teaching and Learning methods.

Barbara spoke often and with great affection of her family (husband, daughter, parents and her twin grandsons.) There is no question that family is the cornerstone of her life.

I am proud to speak to Barbara's staunch character. Not only is she someone committed to her family but, also, committed to her profession.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert C. Bobb".

Robert C. Bobb

Paul J. Dulle

[REDACTED]

January 20, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

I am writing this letter in regards to Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I understand that her sentencing hearing is scheduled for April 13<sup>th</sup> and, in advance of the hearing, I feel the need to briefly share some of the great things that she has done in education and the impact that she has had on me personally and others in my field of education.

Your kind consideration of all the good she has done would be deeply appreciated.

Dr. Byrd-Bennett is a leader whose skills as an educator in some of the nation's most impoverished urban school districts and whose courageous efforts to create a better world for all learners, particularly those who are underserved, are recognized and appreciated by all of us who have worked with her over the years. We all hope and pray that she can continue to use her many talents to support children, educators, and leaders who desperately need her mentoring and support.

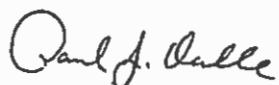
I have known Dr. Byrd-Bennett since 2006. I have seen her inspire superintendents and CEO's of public and private schools to do their difficult jobs in the face of almost insurmountable odds. I have witnessed her as she brilliantly helped shape the thinking of those who work so hard to bring the best products and services to benefit all learners. I have spoken with superintendents and CEO's who have confided that she spent her valuable time coaching and mentoring them and that her advice and counsel have made them stronger and better leaders and human beings. I have been in the audience many times when she was the presenter and have I have felt the power of her words and her indomitable spirit, both formed by her personal experiences in the field she loves and doing the work for young people she so embraces. I remember being so moved when she told me of her calls to the parents of students who were murdered by the senseless violence in the streets of Chicago. She felt their pain and they needed her to share in it with them.

Finally, I have felt the power of her commitment to building a better world that allowed all kids to dream because she fought for her entire career for them to have the kind of education necessary to make those dreams become a reality.

Your Honor, I know that Dr. Byrd-Bennett has accepted full responsibility for her misconduct by pleading guilty, and I also know that she has accepted that her conduct warrants a certain level of punishment. I only share these personal thoughts with you in hopes that this caring and deeply spiritual woman can continue to share her gifts and contribute to the mission of making education better for all learners, especially those who are voiceless, in whatever way she can and for as long as she can.

Thank you for your time and for your good work in this matter.

Sincerely,



Paul J. Dulle

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

January 31, 2017

Dear Judge Chang:

I am writing this letter of support on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. Ms. Byrd-Bennett was my manager at New Leaders—an Education non-profit focused on building the capacity of school leaders in high needs communities in Washington, DC. In the 8 years I have known Ms. Byrd-Bennett, she has demonstrated that she is an innovative leader with a laser-like focus on improving student achievement, a community champion and a thoughtful manager.

Ms. Byrd-Bennett demonstrated her innovative spirit in several ways. Specifically, under her direction, New Leaders DC launched a first-in-kind charter-specific strategic plan for improving leadership and achieving dramatic student academic gains across the Washington, DC charter sector. Ms. Byrd-Bennett also raised significant funds in order to launch this much-needed program, which had an impact on thousands of students and the leaders who served them. Additionally, the leaders who participated in the inaugural program continue to be some of the highest-performing school leaders in the Washington, DC public school sector.

In addition to her innovation, Ms. Byrd-Bennett consistently demonstrated her commitment to the community we served, specifically students of color and students from low-income households and communities. As a leader, she often prioritized the communities most in need of services. She gave her time to staff, leaders, parents and the students who needed her most. Instead of spending her time at the office, she spent her time with the people we served. She provided them guidance and resources to ensure their success. In fact, she restructured our organization to ensure we provided people—both the communities we served as well as our staff—with the resources necessary to surpass their goals. Under her leadership, we were able to raise achievement results for many of the schools and students we supported. What's more, she set us up to design a highly effective and innovative program to sustain the work even after her tenure.

During my time at New Leaders, I learned a great deal about and from Ms. Byrd-Bennett. It was evident that she herself had overcome numerous obstacles because of her ability to make good decisions, her will to succeed and her leadership skills. As one of the first people to attend college in her family and, to some degree, in her immediate community, she had to navigate an unknown system and make her own way. However, Ms. Byrd-Bennett never allowed those obstacles to deter her—in fact, not only did she challenge herself, she also pushed her colleagues to surpass their limits. I know this to be true because I was motivated and inspired by Ms. Byrd-Bennett. When her colleagues faltered, she did not give up on them—rather she lifted them up by providing words of encouragement and by being a great model of success., I was fortunate to experience her leadership firsthand. Ms. Byrd-Bennett is exceptional for many reasons, not least of which are her strength and voice, two traits that I admire most.

Today her legacy and good work are in jeopardy - the hard work and determination that enabled her to have an impact on so many insufficient. I would urge you to consider giving this motivated, innovative, reflective leader the opportunity she has earned to realize her goals and to impact the community she is determined to change.

I hope this letter will serve as a testament to a remarkable human being whose drive, determination and good will make her capable of nothing short of incredible impact around her, wherever she chooses to create change.

Respectfully,  
Thaly Germain

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

WILLIAM R. HITE, JR., Ed.D.  
SUPERINTENDENT

[REDACTED]

January 10, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I am writing to provide a character reference for Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

My name is William Hite and I am currently the superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia. Prior to arriving in Philadelphia I also served as superintendent of the Prince George's County Public School system in Maryland.

My professional relationship with Barbara dates back at least ten years when she was introduced to me by my superintendent in Prince George's County while I served as his deputy. At the time, Barbara was the superintendent in Cleveland. It was during that period when Barbara assumed the role as my coach. In addition to providing technical support related to the role of the superintendent, her more significant coaching came in the form of encouragement and persuasion. She used both approaches to convince me that I was capable of becoming a superintendent and contrary to my self-doubt, could one day serve successfully either as a replacement for her or in some other large urban district. She made a promise to support my development and growth both as a young Black administrator and as a capable and competent urban superintendent. From that point forward she never wavered on that promise and was quick to challenge my assumptions about the work; remained a thoughtful partner; and provided encouragement and praise whenever she noticed the re-emergence of my self-doubt.

I am aware that she has admitted wrongdoing but am compelled to provide this letter as a testament to Barbara's commitment, persistence and tireless efforts to mentor me, to ensure that I would one day be capable and prepared to serve in the role of superintendent. After four years in Maryland and almost five years in Philadelphia I can honestly say I owe in large part my ability to perform in this role to the preparation, encouragements, coaching, love and support that I've received from Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Barbara's support of me as a young administrator provided a framework for me as I now work to support other young and aspiring administrators. It is my hope that I will be as successful using the same approach she used to support me as a model for how I encourage, mentor and support the next generation of administrators.

Sincerely,



William R. Hite, Jr., Ed.D.

WRH/dpw



DR. ALAN J. INGRAM

[REDACTED]

January 8, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

My name is Dr. Alan Ingram. I'm the former deputy commissioner at the state education agency and a school superintendent in Massachusetts, a retired United States Air Force Chief Master Sergeant with over 22-years of military service, and now an independent education consultant residing in Oklahoma. I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett as a friend, mentor and executive coach since 2007. We first met through the Broad Superintendents Academy, a highly competitive national urban superintendents training program where Barbara was a facilitator and I was a participant in the program. Over the years, I have known Barbara to be passionate about her work in improving urban systems, devoted to her family and earnestly committed to helping others fulfill their dreams and career aspirations. She was instrumental in helping me to become a school superintendent.

Barbara has been candid with me in sharing her guilt (unequivocally) and expressions of remorse for her crime of fraud, and as such, I understand the circumstances she faces at sentencing by the court. Although I'm deeply saddened and troubled by her actions in this situation, my hope is that you would consider leniency at sentencing in light of Barbara's entire body of work and the fact that she's accepted responsibility for her actions as evidenced by pleading guilty.

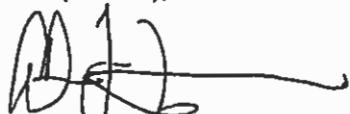
Barbara Byrd-Bennett's life's work in public education has been dedicated to improving education systems as evidenced by her focus on the challenging issues of equity and achievement and the needs of children who have been traditionally underserved in urban communities. As an educator, hundreds of thousands of children have been the beneficiary of her work. She has courageously taken on tough assignments throughout her career to include 12 years as a teacher in New York's public school system, eight years as the principal of a Harlem school that was recognized by the New York State Department

of Education, executive leadership roles in New York City, Cleveland and Detroit prior to Chicago, along with volunteer service on numerous boards, commissions and advisory councils. Her life's work prior to this incident had a profound impact on students, educators, schools and communities across the nation.

Barbara knows she has a lot of work to do in reconciling the mistakes she's made in the commission of her crime and has begun that process by accepting responsibility for her actions, is remorseful and understands that a certain level of punishment is warranted. While her life will never be the same, I'm convinced Barbara will learn from her transgressions, and given an opportunity, find a way to once again be a force multiplier for good in the lives of children, families and society in general.

It is my fervent hope, Your Honor, that you would exercise some discretion for leniency at sentencing for Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

Respectfully,



Alan J. Ingram, Ed.D.

cc: Lara Flath  
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom  
155 North Wacker Drive, Suite 2700  
Chicago, IL 60606

February 2, 2017

To United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois

Your Honor,

I am presenting this character reference of Barbara Byrd-Bennett with a feeling of honor. I am honored because there are few people that I hold in as high regard as her.

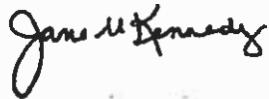
I met Barbara approximately thirteen years ago. We have been colleagues at the same company and colleagues working together in school districts throughout most of these past thirteen years. I am aware that Barbara has admitted wrongdoing in the case that you oversee. Her admittance to wrongdoing and acceptance of the consequences are examples of her character. I would like to share with you additional traits that highlight the positive attributes that define Barbara.

Barbara has three readily, notable characteristics; One, she's perhaps the most dedicated and committed person I've ever met. Her work has always been her first priority. Her work is not just defined by her resume but by her continued focus on ensuring all children are receiving the highest level of achievement. She believes learning is a child's civil right and works tirelessly to ensure it happens. Each decision she makes is for the betterment of children and their education.

Two, she is a true leader that has the ability to inspire. Barbara has a vision to make a positive impact on every community she has worked in. This vision extends beyond the school district she supports but to each member touched by that school district. Her beliefs, her work ethic, and her leadership skills motivate each person around her to both believe in positive change and to give 110% to ensure it occurs. She does not see obstacles but opportunities and leads those around her towards a positive outcome.

Three, she is collaborative. Barbara has a strong stated mission to lead people on but she doesn't believe she alone can accomplish it. She solicits input and feedback from those around her. She knows that all members of her work or personal community have a voice and a part in making a difference. She makes certain that the best of the best are working around her to make the greatest impact on the children and families in her community.

Summarily, Barbara Byrd-Bennett is a person I consider both a respected colleague and a friend. Her life focus since I have known her has been dedicated to the improvement of the children and families in her work communities. She both works with and leads those around her. It is with honor that I submit this character reference.



Jane Kennedy



February 17, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang

As the former Assistant Secretary of Education for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) at the US Dept. of Education I am often asked to write letters and typically refuse. In the case of Barbara Byrd Bennett, I am taking this opportunity to write to you regarding this extraordinary woman whom I have known for several years. Barbara had always demonstrated her commitment to the education of ALL children, and had focused her passion and efforts to ensure that ALL students received the education to which they were entitled.

I have had the pleasure of working with Barbara in several contexts, including her work in Detroit and then during her tenure leading the Chicago Public Schools. On several occasions, we talked about the challenges confronting education leaders and the need for passionate, courageous leadership in the era of No Child Left Behind. We worked together at the Education Research and Development Institute (ERDI) where she would often bring her grandchildren, showing her love and commitment to family during these meetings where we would talk with Superintendents from across the country who attended ERDI.

During one meeting of the Urban Special Education Collaborative, Barbara was asked to speak to the Special Ed leaders from across the country who came to learn about current issues in the field of Special Education. She used that occasion to implore Special Education leaders to have high expectations for Students with Disabilities and ensure that they received an excellent education, recognizing the need to improve outcomes and results for Students with Disabilities. Her remarks were inspiring and informative, and showed her passionate commitment to educating ALL our students.

Barbara is a warm, loving, caring, person whose infectious charm was always evident in our interactions. I write this letter to provide evidence of her work on behalf of educating ALL students, and her gift to inspire and inform other educators of the need to ensure that ALL students receive the education they deserve. Her oratory was always based on her personal commitment and experiences, delivered with a sincere passion rare in the world of urban Superintendents faced with the awesome challenge of leading large, urban school districts.

Barbara has acknowledged the mistakes she made and this letter is sent to encourage your Honor to know her work on behalf of students done throughout her career and recognize her unique talents and leadership which were hallmarks of her career spent working on behalf of ALL students. I am proud to call her a friend and admire the work she has done throughout her career.

Respectfully Submitted,

*robert pasternack*

The Honorable Robert H. Pasternack, Ph.D.; NCSP

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

October 20, 2016

Your Honor,

My name is James E. Ray and I am writing this letter in support of Barbara Byrd Bennett, someone I have known professionally for over twenty-eight years and personally-through our work together as urban school superintendents-for the past fifteen. As superintendents in similar urban school districts, we have been a part of some of the same professional organizations for nearly three decades. Personally, we begin working together when she, at the time, was serving as the CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District in Ohio and I was serving a Superintendent in Residence for the San Francisco based Stupski Foundation which I will say more about shortly.

Barbara has always been known as an advocate and real champion for students. Her work in New York was well documented and highly respected. She managed and helped to move the academic needle for so many young people leading what was known then as the Chancellor's district where she took on the most challenging and lowest performing schools in the city. Through her strategic leadership, she was able to move a large number of these schools off the low performing list and put others on track toward systemic academic improvement.

District's across the country studied this approach and begin to emulate aspects of this design model that had a high concentration on every child-regardless of color-being served in schools that many had written off. She saw no child being expendable. The approach-employing research-based techniques combined with evidence-based educational designs-yielded tremendous results for the youngsters being served in the cohort of schools that made up the Chancellor's district.

As a result of the innovative and targeted approaches to transitioning low performing schools to high performing schools, she became a highly sought after speaker and presenter at many of the national educational conferences that I participated in and that provided me with an opportunity to meet her and learn first hand about her tremendous work in New York. I found her to be gracious in her sharing of ideas and strategies.

Even after I resigned my position as district superintendent in Flint, Michigan, I keep abreast of the work she was now doing in the Cleveland Municipal School District in Ohio. Ironically, after I accepted the position of Superintendent in Residence for the aforementioned Stupski Foundation in California- where we work with some of the leading and most progressive urban school district in the country-I was assigned to work with Barbara in Cleveland.

I deem it important to point out the fact that the late Larry Stupski and his wife Joyce had as a mission, a commitment to dramatically influence the outcome for students-primarily African American and Latino-attending schools in urban centers across the country where in some cases, overwhelming educational challenges exist. None of the districts-and there some ten involved in the cohort-could apply for financial and personnel assistance but had to be selected based on demonstrated excellence in leadership and personal commitment. All the leaders in the districts we identified had demonstrated such commitment over time to meeting the educational needs of all students being served. Barbara and her district Cleveland, was one of the first districts ask to participate based everyones belief and understanding that she exemplified the type of leadership and personal commitment required to improve the educational outcomes for all students in Cleveland.

Having worked with many highly effective leaders across the country , I found Barbara to be not only an exceptional leader but one who had distinguished herself by the way she personalized her role, building strong and broad-based support from across the entire school community. Her deep and authentic caring for all young people being served in the district was evident by the way she engaged all she came in contact with.

As the Superintendent in Residence for Cleveland, I spent quality time working directly with Barbara. We talked not only about strategy-and literacy was a cornerstone of all the efforts-but about individual students, staff and employees in the district. There was always a story about some young people she had met in one of the schools that invigorated and reinsured her that there was no more important work than the work she was engaging in. It was always personal, that no child was expendable and all children deserve the same educational opportunities as students in surrounding, more affluent school districts.

There were countless times and examples where she just stopped what was planned to attend to an unexpected issue that pertained to a student or staff. She was never too busy to sit and listen to a parent who was at his/her "wits end" and had come downtown-unscheduled-to see "the person in charge". I sat with her, listening and watching how she engaged and personally addressed concerns expressed. I have also seen her fight against policies and practices-both local, state and national-that hindered more expeditious approaches student learning.

As I write these heartfelt words of support and talk about Barbara's personal commitment to students in particular, I cannot help but to share just one example that shines a light on just how much she cares for young people's growth and development. There are many personal student related stories about her in Cleveland but the one that comes to mind, and I want to take a minute to highlight, occurred while she was the CEO in Chicago.

Barbara had to make one of the toughest decisions a leader can make in a town that loves its basketball. One of the high school teams had won the city finals only to learn later that there was some question about a player who may have been ineligible. For some enthusiasts, they wanted

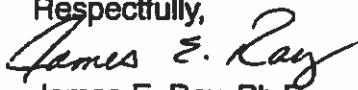
to over look this and move on. All of us know how high school students, school staff and community loves and cherish their teams but Barbara made a decision that was not popular but right. She-based on the evidence presented-rescinded the championship.

The story here is that Barbara herself, communicated-face-to-face-the decision. She talked to the players, the staff and the community-she did the right thing. But the point here is that she did not stop there. While engaging the team itself, she related to two brothers who were on the team who needed additional assistance. I know as a fact that she personally-out of pocket- provided for these two young men and their family at some level. She help to get one into a community college here in Flint, Michigan where I live and he now has an opportunity for a scholarship. She arranged for him to be driven here from Chicago and continues to support both brothers financially. She is someone they look to for guidance.

This is not atypical for Barbara. I saw example after example of such acts of kindness in Detroit where our professional and personal paths crossed once again. We both ended up working with a transitional team that was assigned to the Detroit School District by the current Governor. This was a period where the Detroit School District had gone into state receivership. We made tremendous progress with the community-who in most cases did not welcome this appointed team coming in to basically run their school district. Much progress occurred as a result of Barbara's ability to meet and engage community leaders in a way unique to many, allowing many partnerships to be built-partnerships that were critical to our success in assisting the district. On a side note, her Spanish speaking ability was a true asset in reaching the Hispanic community-she was our team's leader.

Let me begin closing by saying-as it pertains to this situation-that I know Barbara has accepted full responsibility for her actions. There is no question that she is remorseful-I have had conversations with her as her friend. I know for a fact that she has been an exemplary educator but for me, a better person who cares deeply about her children and family and other people's children as well-thus her authentic commitment to the field where she has served so very long. I have never-and no one I know who knows her well like I do-have ever question her character and I won't now. I know and have seen first hand the work she has done for "all" children-particularly the underprivileged and disenfranchised.

Lastly, I want to say that she has always been to me, someone with high moral values and stellar character. What has occurred has not changed how I feel and think, especially given the fact that she is taking responsibility for the decision that has led to this point. This is not to say in anyway that what transpired can be ignored but I do hope and pray that all the good work for young people across this county is factored into any decision made.

Respectfully,  
  
James E. Ray, Ph.D

Rosa A. Smith, PhD



Honorable Edmond W. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

October 15, 2016

Your Honor,

I have had deep reflections about writing this letter for Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I wondered what I could contribute of value in addition to those who worked side by side with her everyday observing her devotion to students and the improvement of services by the adults who served students.

Perhaps, the value I bring at this critical time is to simply describe the value Barbara was to me. She, without her knowledge, became my long distant instructor and later my friend. Barbara and I arrived about the same time in Ohio as superintendents of the two largest school districts in the state. I was from a small district in Beloit, WI and she was from a large sophisticated NYC district.

I found myself reading her presentations, observing her work from afar, and talking with Cleveland staff and others I knew there. I evaluated and admired her courageous staff and organizational decisions. I examined the logic of her decisions and considered her perspective compared to my opinions and decisions. After meeting Barbara, I found that she was like MIT in that she freely shared all of her intellectual capital and local and national network. While Barbara had earned a national reputation, she was always seeking ways to support and leverage the leadership of her colleagues. It is with absolute certainty that I was a more consequential superintendent, as a result of having Barbara as one of my role models.

As a significant friend, I found Barbara to be transparent, authentic, truthful and always thoughtfully reflective with me. When I was making a decision that might have unintended consequences, she was direct and forthcoming, as she coached me by sharing additional questions and information needing reconsideration. While a strong woman known for straight talk, Barbara's way with significant friends was always constructive. I am not surprised that Barbara has accepted full responsibility for her misconduct because this is the way I have always known her to be...responsible for her decisions.

Barbara and I left Ohio, stayed in contact and pursued different professional paths before working together again at New Leaders for New Schools. Again, I was reminded of her talents and desire to improve the professional outcome of leaders. During our time there, she was asked to mentor new superintendents and others in the organization. Barbara always improves the work of others and I have never heard anyone complain about their experience working with her.

Barbara is a very compassionate person. Regardless of her busy schedule, she seemed to know of the high and low points in the lives of her colleagues/friends and would reach out to celebrate, provide support or grieve with them. My sister died last year. Barbara was immersed in her legal issues, but understood my pain and reached out to me in a meaningful way. She still considers and prays for others.

Women, who spend their lives in leadership positions, rarely have a safe space to fully discuss their families, our love for our husbands, children and grandchildren and to admit our personal sacrifices. One of the things I have always loved about Barbara is her unabashed public devotion to her family. She opened the space for women leaders everywhere to feel positive about being leaders, wives and mothers.

Barbara has impacted the lives of children across America by impacting the leadership of so many who aspire to the superintendency. Many children are better educated because of her. Many adults became servant leaders who believe in the value of all children because of her.

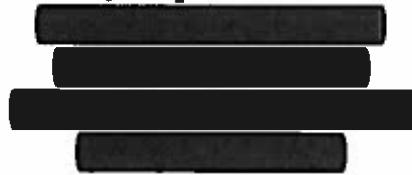
Lastly, I am convinced that after accepting the consequences for her decisions, Barbara will once again commit herself to work and service that solely focuses on improving the quality of life for America's most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,



Rosa A. Smith, PhD

Joseph Wise



December 20, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

This letter is in regards to *Barbara Byrd Bennett*. I feel compelled to provide a perspective on Dr. Byrd Bennett, and trust your consideration of my position regarding her work and contributions to our profession and our Nation.

For more than 14 years I have known Dr. Byrd Bennett, and I have direct knowledge of her work, and her impact on so many children and families, particularly those traditionally under-served and under-represented. Barbara and I served as colleague school superintendents in respective large urban areas. She has, for a long time, been an important mentor, coach, and critical friend to me in my own work in urban education. Additionally, Dr. Byrd Bennett's impact as a mentor and coach has been deeply positive and substantial for so many novice educators over the decades of her work as they each developed their own capacity to serve the needs of children across our Nation.

Dr. Byrd Bennett has performed her decades of work tightly aligned with her own spiritual, professional, and patriotic values which have caused her to be a profoundly effective leader for thousands of children and families in New York, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago. Her reach has extended nationally and internationally to untold numbers of children, families, and educators.

Now more than ever, we need Dr. Byrd Bennett's advocacy, expertise, and flat-out championing of under-performing populations of students who, without a great education, have no meaningful capacity to prevent their own drain on societal resources. Barbara remains one of the best-positioned experts to help students and educators contribute mightily to their communities. I feel that her absence from our important work of educating kids and preparing them for college- and career-success would be tragic. Even during this recent hiatus due to these legal challenges, her absence from the work is sorely missed.

Your consideration of Barbara's importance in the work we do, and her longstanding professional record, rooted in high levels of ethics and integrity will be greatly appreciated. While I am not privy to the details of the legal proceedings over which you are presiding, I do know of the moral and ethical fabric from which Barbara is made. I am aware of Barbara's acceptance of her responsibility for these circumstances and of her cooperation in the various investigations working toward appropriate conclusions. Regardless of the outcome for Barbara, I am certain she will use all this for building on the good in her ongoing work of helping others.

If you desire further information, please feel free to contact me. My contact information is provided above.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of my perspective on Barbara and her importance to America's schools, children, and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joseph Wise".

Joseph Wise

Bruce F. Bennett

[REDACTED]

February 12, 2017

Honorable Judge Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

My letter will be brief as I am overcome with emotion and find it difficult to share all that is in my mind and heart.

I met Barbara Byrd-Bennett in 1983 when she and I worked together at a small college in Harlem, New York City. In 1985, we began a personal relationship and in 1988 we were married. I have known Barbara in many capacities during this more than thirty year period. I know her as my wife, a mother, a grandmother, a daughter, a beloved family member, a professional, a community activist, humanitarian, an educator and friend to those who would be left behind. She is simply without equal.

I say this without any prejudice at all! I have witnessed her essence time and time again and I have always been in awe of her drive and commitment. Barbara is probably one of the two or three most impressive people I have known in my life. There are so many young people and adults who have been directly impacted by Barbara in New York City, Washington DC, Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit Michigan; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and yes, even in Chicago, Illinois. In cities where she has conducted professional trainings and in organizations where she has advised, her input is measurable.

I know personally where she has worried about children who were under dressed in frigid weather conditions or her caring for parents who needed carfare for a job interview. She stepped in to assist them. Together we have braved five story walk ups in dangerous neighborhoods to avoid leaving an elementary school child at a police precinct because the parent had not picked the child up from school. I could cite so many instances to demonstrate who Barbara is as a care-giver for so many. Each experience with Barbara has impacted me and as a result I am a more careful and sensitive citizen of my community.

Barbara has always been clear about her responsibilities and to acknowledge her mistakes. In our current situation, Barbara has not changed. I see the depth of her remorse, her shame and pain every day. I have watched as she struggles to understand

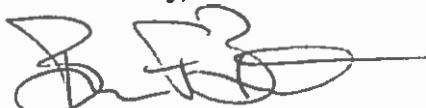
what led her to the actions and the decisions she made in Chicago. And I know had she paused to think and if she thought she was committing any crime, her actions would have been entirely different. Nevertheless, she makes no excuses. She prays. She weeps but she make no excuses.

My wife and I have wept together as we have been through the deaths of family members and friends. We wrapped our arms around each other in preparation for our daughter's wedding. We laugh at memorable instances as our grandchildren navigate through school. We have supported each other through hospitalizations and severe health situations. I support her now and we need each other now.

I love Barbara as a wife and life partner. My commitment to her is absolute. I ask that you consider Barbara, not as the usual person who comes before you under these circumstances. She is not that usual person at all! Her life does count for all that she has contributed to students and families in the communities where she has worked.

I respectfully request....No, I respectfully implore you to see her as a woman worthy of leniency. Our family, our community and I need her.

Yours truly,



Bruce F. Bennett

Nailah K. Byrd, Esq.  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

Judge Chang,

This letter is extremely difficult for me to write. My name is Nailah Khadijah Byrd. I am a mother, a wife, an attorney, a former Assistant United States Attorney, and most importantly I am the only daughter of Barbara Byrd Bennett. My mother is and always has been my best friend, my mother, my champion, my role model and the person I aspire to be. None of that has changed.

I grew up for most of my life, from the age of seven until the age of sixteen, with a single parent, my mother. My mother was my mother and my father. During my childhood, she instilled in me to always be kind and treat others with respect and empathy. She also taught me the importance of hard work and that through hard work, dedication and commitment all of my dreams would come true. She was who I could and did turn to for unwavering support, love, guidance, and advice as I navigated through my formative years at an extremely elite and highly competitive independent school in Riverdale, New York.

As a teenager I was very athletic. I played three varsity sports throughout high school and although my mother worked two and often times three jobs to pay the school's exuberant tuition, she never missed a track meet, basketball game, softball game or school event. She was at every concert, play, and parent/ teacher conference. She even found time to volunteer at the school. Most importantly though, she was my advocate when I faced ugly racist comments from my peers and my teachers.

I distinctly remember when I was in elementary school, a wealthy classmate called me a "nigger" and a "jungle bunny". That evening over dinner, I shared my days' events with my mom. This was a routine of ours. After school we would sit together at the kitchen table and I would share what occurred during my school day. I innocently asked my mother what a "jungle bunny" was. She asked me why and where I had heard that name. I explained. She was shocked and tearful. However, she explained to me that those words were derogatory and were not reflective of my character. She wiped my tears and comforted me. She reassured me of my value and committed to address this situation with the school the following day. She did.

When I was in high school and my Advanced Placement American History teacher told the class the only contribution African-Americans made to American history was jazz music. I was shocked. Because of my mother and her commitment to supplementing my formal

education, I knew that African-Americans made significant contributions to this country. During class I spoke up; however, my teacher never wavered in his position. That evening during our kitchen table conversation, I shared with my mom what the teacher said. We discussed why the statement was incorrect and not supported by facts. The next day my mother went to the school and demanded this teacher correct his statement. Also during high school, my biology teacher told me a B+ was a “good grade for my people,” even though my white lab partner received an A on the same assignment. My mom went to the school the following morning to advocate for me. She again demanded these reckless comments be corrected. I share these examples because they helped to mold who I am and how I now advocate for my own sons. I always knew I was, and I still am, my mother’s number one priority. I knew I could always ask my mother for support or help and she would be there to advocate on my behalf. I always knew her commitment and love was unwavering.

Throughout my years at Horace Mann, my mother instilled in me the belief, not that I was special just because, but instead I was offered an incredible opportunity and I had a tremendous responsibility to make the most of that opportunity. But, I should never forget and/or look down upon those who did not have the same opportunity. I should treat everyone with the same amount of courtesy and respect I wanted and deserved. I should continue to hold my head up high, and know that although I was different from the majority of my classmates, I still had as much right to be there as they did. These are lessons I now instill in my twelve year old sons as they attempt to navigate a similarly competitive elite independent school in Cleveland, Ohio.

While I was in high school, my mother was a principal of an elementary school in Harlem, New York. In fact, as far back as I can remember, my mom dedicated her life’s work to serving under privileged children. Although I am an only child, I was always surrounded by children. Children who my mother taught would frequently visit our home for a hot meal or to receive warm clothes. Educating children is not a job for my mother. It is her passion. It is her calling. She spent countless hours at work, often with me by her side providing children with extra help. My mom strongly believes that all children can learn and can succeed. Some simply needed someone to believe in them. That someone was my mother.

Because of the hard work my mother instilled in me, I was fortunate to attend Columbia University and later law school. After law school, I accepted an offer to become an Assistant District Attorney in New York City under the prominent District Attorney, Robert Morgenthau. My desire and drive towards this career path was and still is directly tied to my mother. I too wanted to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. I wanted to give back to my community. And although more lucrative jobs were available, I wanted to work in the public sector. I wanted to make an indelible mark on my community like my mom had.

Ultimately, in part because of the tragedy of 9-11, I decided to relocate from New York City, the only place I had ever lived, and move to Cleveland, Ohio to join my mother. She had accepted a job there and was alone. I missed her terribly and 9-11 was a great “reason” to join her.

While in Cleveland I married and had children. My twin sons, Jalen and Khalil, are literally the center of my mother's universe and she is the center of theirs. She was there when they were born and has continued to be there. The love, the bond, and the relationship the three of them share cannot adequately be described in words. She is their "Grandma", their friend, their advocate and their teacher. She is for them many of the same things she was for me when I was their age. It is fascinating, yet inspirational, for me to observe her teach my boys the same lessons she taught me during my childhood.

My mother has attended numerous doctor appointments with me and my children, parent teacher conferences, school musical performances and sporting events. In fact, even when my mother worked outside of Cleveland, she never missed a "Grandparents Day" at my sons' school.

When my mother lived in Cleveland, we had weekly family dinners. This was where my husband, my children and I could relax and enjoy my mom and stepfather. We would unplug and discuss everything from current events, pop culture, politics, school, work, sports, you name it. Of course, much of the conversation was dominated by my sons sharing their stories with their grandma. She would always listen intently and provide guidance if necessary. Often, the three of them would share an inside joke or conversation not meant for the rest of us. The bond my mother and my sons share is so strong, most times my stepdad, husband and I were observers to their conversations.

My mother and I share a closeness, an almost symbiotic relationship. It is a gift to simply have my mom to call and to talk with about all of the difficulties of motherhood. I cannot count the number of phone calls I make weekly to seek her advice about an issue with my boys, my relationships and/or my job. I always know she will give it to me straight. We talk multiple times a day about every and all subjects. Because of our closeness, I have witnessed first-hand, probably more than anyone else, how the last two years has literally destroyed her. Although this honorable court has not yet imposed a sentence, my mother has been in prison for the last two years. The shame, the guilt, and the remorse she feels weigh heavily upon her. I know the unknown, the uncertainty of prison, and the being away from family scares her; but more importantly, the guilt, the shame and the realization of her wrongdoing is even worse.

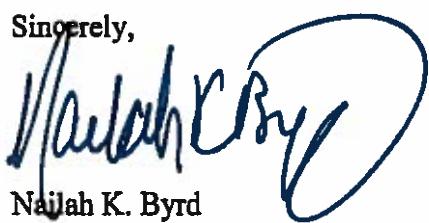
Your honor, my mother is a good woman. Actually, she is the most giving person I know. This was a huge mistake, a terrible mishap in an otherwise stellar career. I beg of you, please do not let this one terrible error define her. Please show compassion and leniency and depart downward from the guideline range.

Your honor, I was an Assistant United States Attorney in the Northern District of Ohio and I was the first Inspector General of Cuyahoga County, Ohio. I fully understand, value, and appreciate laws and ethical rules that govern our behaviors. But I also realize that prison is about punishment and reducing the risk of recidivism. My mother has been punished. The shame, the tremendous guilt, and the everyday embarrassment is severe. She also punishes herself with the daily realization that she committed a crime. That she made a grave error. Also, my mother who will soon be sixty-eight years old is not going to reoffend. For my mom, prison will not serve its intended purpose.

Your honor, my mother has dedicated over forty years of her life to serving children. She served them well. She made a difference in so many lives. In fact about a year ago, I was walking through the Cuyahoga County Justice Center in Cleveland, Ohio and a Correction Officer stooped me. He introduced himself and said he was educated in Cleveland Public School District. He knew my mother. He wanted me to know that he was one of her "Fellows". It was because of her that he attended college and now was a Correction Officer. He asked me to thank her and to tell her he was praying for her because he knew she was a good woman. I thanked him and walked away. This is only one example of the many lives my mother has touched.

Please Judge, have mercy and impose a minimal prison term.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Najah K. Byrd".

Najah K. Byrd

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Edmond Chang,

Please accept this letter as a request for leniency in the sentencing of my friend and sister Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for over fifty years as a former sister-in-law and current friend. I had the pleasure to meet and get to know Barbara when I was ten years old. At the time, she was a college student dating my older brother and she immediately began treating me as a younger sister. Barbara taught me the importance of education, traveling and the beauty of the arts. Because of her, I also had the pleasure to enjoy restaurants, plays and museums to name a few. Being the only girl in a family with four brothers, I admired Barbara and cherished our time together. On several occasions, Barbara allowed me to stay with her during summer break introducing me to college life. This early introduction inspired me to pursue higher education and to dedicate myself as she did to the education and advancement of children. Particularly children in the inner city where the need is greatest. Barbara has always exemplified kindness and caring traits as they relate to helping others. Throughout her marriage to my brother I was able to see firsthand the love and commitment that she has for her family and the overall education of youths. The time and consideration that Barbara showed to me helped to shape me as a mother and educator as well.

One thing that inspired me was Barbara starting the breakfast program for her school class within an inner city environment. Barbara fed her students every morning initially with her personal funds and with the support of classroom parents. She understood the challenges with learning on an empty stomach. Seeing her compassion and commitment led me to volunteer in several food programs to feed our youth and families today.

During my tenure as an educator in one of the poorest school districts in New Jersey, Barbara provided a workshop that helped local students and teachers. She traveled to the district where I lived and worked to provide a professional development workshop to both teachers and administrators. Her keynote message was uplifting and inspiring. This shows the value that she places on education along with the support that she continuously and effortlessly offers family and inner city communities.

Barbara has been a dedicated mother to my niece Nailah and grandmother to my great nephews Jalen and Khalil. She continues to be a role model for my daughters and their families.

I am aware that Barbara has admitted her wrongdoing and has accepted due punishment. I implore you to consider the span of her dedication and achievements in educating and uplifting youth throughout her career. Please consider her continued commitment to uplifting her community.

Sincerely,

*Donna Byrd Taylor*

Donna Byrd-Taylor

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

# Church of the Resurrection

[www.churchofresurrection.org](http://www.churchofresurrection.org)

January 18, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. I have known Barbara for a year and a half. I met her shortly after I arrived at the Church of the Resurrection of our Lord Parish when I was named pastor in July 2015.

Barbara is a parishioner here at the Church of the Resurrection and attends mass here weekly. She is well known and respected in the parish community. While she is not overly involved in many of the parish activities, this year she has agreed to serve as a parish sponsor for an African American women who is part of our Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Normandy, the women Barbara is sponsoring in the RCIA has some special needs. Barbara has been extremely gracious in her willingness to be of assistance and in offering her support. I am grateful for the support that Barbara is willing to offer to Normandy.

I have had a number of opportunities over the year and a half to meet with Barbara in what I would describe as a spiritual direction relationship. As you can imagine, she has shared with me the circumstances of her present situation and takes full responsibility for the mistake that she has made. Never once in our conversation has she leveled blame on anyone else, tried to excuse her mistakes, nor has she been critical of anyone else. Rather, I believe she understands the wrong that she has done and accepts that her conduct warrants a certain level of punishment.

As an educator and professional women who has had high standing in the community, I believe she regrets the mistakes that she has made and the pain that it has brought to her husband, her elderly mother, family and grandchildren.

Prior to being named pastor of Resurrection Parish, I knew of Barbara Byrd-Bennett and her successful career as an educator. I recall her time serving as Superintendent of the Cleveland School system and the collaborative work that she did with the Education Office of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland. However, having had the time to meet with her personally and sit down for one on one conversation, I have found her to be a women who is committed to the education of children, most especially the marginalized and disenfranchised. The stories that she has shared of some of the students she encountered, not in a bragging way, but rather in a spirit of admiration for their zeal to learn suggests to me that at Barbara's very core is a person who cares deeply for people and wants what is best for them. It is obvious to me that Barbara has a passion for education and for helping young people make the most of their lives through learning. Our conversations have always tried to focus on what is good, right and holy for the people we encounter. This is not something that came to her as of late, but rather is part and parcel of her being. She often speaks of what she has learned from her mother and father and how much they influenced her to be of service to others.

As you can well imagine, my heart goes out to Barbara. I am convinced she sincerely recognizes the wrong she has done and has accepted responsibility for her mistake. She is a good women who understands deep within her being that she did something wrong. I have simply tried to help her focus on the good person that God has created and to move forward with a spirit of hope for the future.

If I can be of any further assistance or to you or if you would like to contact me personally I can be reached at [REDACTED]

Sincerely yours,

  
Rev. Thomas M. Dragga  
Pastor

Jan. 1, 2016

United states district Court

Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

" Judge Chang"

I met Barbara about twelve years ago. She was hosting a shower for a mutual friend. When we met, (although she was quit busy) she was very attentive to each of her guests. I was drawn to her friendly personality.

As the years progressed in our friendship through her conversations and actions I became more aware of what a wonderful person she is.

Her love for children and their education is such a great part of who she is. She never talked about what she was doing to help them. I know of a time when she helped two homeless boys. Not only with her love and guidance, but gave them the opportunity for a good education. This helped them to have a better life. She is always there when her family and friends need her. She is a special daughter, sister, mother, grandmother and friend. It doesn't matter what the circumstances are if she can help she is there.

As I learned about her childhood she was raised in a religious home. She learned to be loving, caring, and honest. Education was very important in her home. She received a wonderful foundation for her life. I believe this is when she developed her love for education and her love for children. She is very intelligent and her knowledge is boundless. I feel blessed to have met her and so happy to call her my friend. She is so special to me and will be a friend forever.

Sincerely yours,



Angela M. Giacci



Littler Mendelson, PC  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

March 20, 2017

Richard R. Harris  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court - Northern District of Illinois  
Courtroom 2119, Chambers 2178  
Everett McKinley Dirksen  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60604

**RE: Barbara Byrd**

Dear Judge Chang:

I have a heavy-heart as I write this letter on behalf of Barbara Byrd (Barbara). I met Barbara a few minutes before the rehearsal dinner for her daughter, Nallah Byrd, who was marrying my college roommate Ed Suggs. At the dinner, Barbara greeted me with a huge hug, and said, "I've heard so much about you—I'm so glad you could make it." After she greeted everyone else at the rehearsal dinner, she gave a toast to her daughter and soon-to-be son-in law. Barbara's grace, warmth and presence were undeniable.

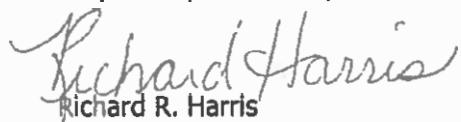
I'm a partner of an international law-firm whose practice involves advising C-Suite members, and outside directors of public companies. I'm fortunate to advise recognizable industry leaders on a regular basis. Without question, Barbara is the most accomplished leader I've ever interacted with. In her home, she has an "awards room" which adorns her accolades ranging from plaques to "key(s) to the City." Barbara's reputation as an innovator in public education reform is unparalleled. She led the Cleveland School District before taking the helm in Chicago, and prior to both positions, she was a leader in New York City's public school system. The awards and accomplishments are representative of the changes she brought to educational systems fraught with challenges. Her greatest accomplishment, in my opinion, is described in the various letters she received from former students who credit her for transforming their lives. Any of us who've had the fortune of having that one teacher or educator take an individual interest in us—knows how transformative that can be. Paul Tough, in his seminal work, *How Children Succeed*, conveys a narrative that far too often many students from low-income communities lack contact with educators who understand the importance of – individualized-intervention. Barbara, clearly, understood their impact and deployed effective mentoring, counseling, and skills building in every district she led.

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
March 20, 2017  
Page 2

Barbara pled guilty to the Indictment, and it is my understanding she has provided *substantial cooperation* to the government for an on-going investigation. This Court is permitted to sentence her within the ambit of discretion as contemplated by the Federal Sentencing Commission and Congress. Deterrence, Punishment, and Rehabilitation are factors that will be considered; however, I submit that justice will not be served by sentencing Barbara to a term of incarceration. Her life has been irrevocably altered, she can no longer pursue her life's mission nor can she utilize her vast resources to effectuate change in urban public education reform. The real tragedy is that countless students and parents have lost a champion and advocate.

As she awaits sentencing, I'm reminded of Dr. Martin Luther King's last sermon where he asked his congregation to remember – "we are all going to have to meet our creator, and when we do, we will be judged – not by the incidents of our life - but by the arc of our life;" Barbara's had a dynamic arc.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Richard R. Harris

RRH/nmc

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Alysia James  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

February 2, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Greetings Honorable Judge Chang,

My name is Alysia James and Barbara Byrd-Bennett is my only maternal aunt. She's also my godmother and has held a special role in my life ever since the day I was born. I've always looked up to her and admired her intelligence, grace, strength and the ability she has to be so kindhearted. I used to honestly believe she was a superhero.

For as long as I can remember, my aunt Barbara (or *Titi* as I call her) has always placed a strong emphasis on the importance of education as well as family. We'd often take family trips to libraries, museums, art exhibits and theaters. Or visit churches, amusement parks and beaches—all of which, I now realize, opened my eyes to so many different cultures, people and ways of life. She always found ways of making learning fun.

When I was a senior in high school, I had already lined up a job with a major recording label that I was to begin immediately following graduation. Even though I was an honor roll scholar, I had absolutely no interest in attending college. Barbara, although supportive, really wanted me to see that furthering my education would be a more advantageous decision. She felt as though I was too bright to settle for less. We visited a handful of colleges and, long story short, 4 years later I graduated with honors from Fordham University with a BA in Communications and Media Studies. I went on to become a publicist with a Public Relations agency.

Today, my aunt continues to positively influence my life. After a while, I grew tired of the fast paced world of fashion and media and decided I wanted to make a major career change—into education. I guess the teaching bug is in our blood. I'm now a Guidance Counselor at an inner city middle school in New York. Barbara is always available to offer advice, ideas and words of wisdom to help me make an influential impact in their young lives.

As I've grown older our bond has become stronger. I know I can talk to her about anything and get an honest, heartfelt response. She won't just tell me what I want to hear...but what I need to hear. I love my aunt unconditionally and I know she loves me. She constantly expresses how she's proud of me and the woman I've become. She has let me know that she admires my mothering abilities and the relationship I'm building with my daughter, Breece. She is 6 years old and the way Barbara adores her is such a sight to see. The games they play together, the little chats they have and the way she builds my daughter up to believe that she is capable of achieving anything could warm the coldest of hearts.

I traveled to Chicago to be there with Barbara when she pled guilty. I'm sure these words were not easy for her to say, but she has always been one to accept her end of responsibility. I feel so bad for her because she repeatedly talks about how sorry she is and how stupid she believes she was. Barbara is so worried that she's let us all down or that she's an embarrassment to the family. This is absolutely not true, but this is how she feels. We've had many talks about her fate and she's terrified. Terrified that we'll no longer love her. Terrified that she'll miss out on watching my daughter and her grandson's grow up. Terrified that my grandmother will be heartbroken and potentially pass on while she's "away". Terrified that her little sister, my mother, will have to bare the weight of the entire family on her shoulders. We've cried together, prayed together and have faith and hope that things will all work out for the better.

Your Honor, Barbara is aware that she will have to pay the consequences for her actions, but if you'd be so kind as to grant Barbara leniency when determining her sentence she and our entire family would be most grateful.

I thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Best regards,

  
Alycia James

February 13, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Judge Chang:

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for approximately twenty years. I met Barbara when my daughter, Lisa Ruda, went to work for Barbara at the Cleveland Municipal School District.

During this time, we have become very good friends. We have bonded over children, grandchildren and family.

Barbara has always been a person you can count on. Her loyalty is second to none.

We have celebrated holidays together. We have been together thru family losses, births of grandchildren, graduations and weddings. I can remember when my granddaughters were very young, they asked me if Barbara and the boys could be our cousins and could they tell everyone that. Out of the mouth of babes.

Those were easier times. Barbara and her family came to Amanda's (my eldest granddaughter's graduation party) this past summer. It's not easy when you come to an event and there are other guests there who are probably wondering what is happening to you and your situation. But my friend came and celebrated Amanda's graduation. I was so happy that she came but I expected nothing less.

I love Barbara, my family loves Barbara. She has been there for us and I want to be there for her. We have laughed together and cried together.

I am not a person who says things or recommends people without truly meaning it. I mean this.

Barbara is a wonderful person. As the old saying goes, if I had to be in a fox hole with someone, I'd be there with Barbara.

Please find compassion for this lady. Barbara means so much to her family and ours.

Thank you.

*Linda S. Kolozsi*

Linda S. Kolozsi

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Mrs.Helen B. Lee



February 10, 2017

Honorable Judge Edmond Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

On July 27, 1949, God blessed me and my husband Wallace with our first born child. A baby girl we named Barbara. My name is Helen Lee and I am Barbara's mother and I write this letter to you, Judge Chang to beg for mercy for my daughter. This is a very hard letter for me to write to you. But I need to tell you Barbara is not a bad person and she never has been in any trouble. She was never in trouble with neighbors, school or police.

She was always a smart and sensitive child who wanted to learn everything there was to learn. Even as early as kindergarten she was helping others. Her teacher told me she was always busy helping the other little children with their buttons and galoshes. As a child she always wanted to know the why about everything and to fix all the wrongs she saw. She has always been caring for those in trouble. I remember once she had a job and went to work after school on Tuesdays, Thursdays and on Saturday mornings for a record company. One Saturday she came home with a stranger. The girl was supposed to be picked up at the bus station by the family she was going to be working for but they did not come for her. The girl had nowhere to go so Barbara brought her home to stay with us until we could find the family. Barbara did not want her to be alone on 42nd street with people who might take advantage of her. She has never stopped helping people. Even now she is helping two boys who were strangers to her, make their way thru college.

Barbara is strong willed and was always eager to make us proud. And she has done just that. I remember when she got her first teaching job. She got orchestra seats to the theatre for her and her father to see Evita for his birthday.

We have been incredibly proud of her accomplishments. We always talked about education and school at home. When she graduated from high school we were so proud and then she was the first in our entire family to go to college and to graduate. Barbara said

she was going to be a lawyer but then she changed her mind because she said she could do more to help if she became a teacher.

I can say that we did not always agree with her decisions, but we were always supportive of her. We did not think she should have married so young. She married after she graduated from college but she was only 19 years old. When she was 23 she had her daughter, Nailah, and loved her dearly from day one.

When Barbara and her first husband got divorced, we wanted to help her but she would not let us. She was always independent so she worked three jobs to make sure her daughter had what she needed and sent her to one of the best schools in New York City. Barbara was a teacher and then a principal at a school in the neighborhood where she grew up. She wanted to give back to her community. She said the only way for children to be successful is to get a good education.

She married Bruce when her daughter was sixteen and she made sure everyone liked him before she married him. She kept the name Byrd because she said she did not want her daughter to think she had abandoned her and it would keep them connected. I watched her when her grandchildren were born. She loves them so much and they love her. No matter what she always goes to their school events, games and concerts. She spends weekends with them, spring breaks, and summer vacation in Hilton Head. The family counts on Barbara to organize our times together. At family gathering she checks to be sure everyone has what they need and that everyone is ok.

We missed her so much when she moved to Cleveland to work. She came back to New York as much as she could or she would save and surprise her father and me and have us come to Cleveland to stay with her. She made sure that the house had a room and bathroom for me and her father. The plan was for us to come and live with her when she retired, so she could be there with us.

We were really happy when she resigned from Cleveland after working so hard. We thought she was going to take it easy for a while. But deep down we knew that wasn't going to last long. She can't even sit still long enough to watch a television show without getting up to do something.

When she was working in Chicago, her father was diagnosed with cancer. I watched her struggle to accept this. My other daughter called and told her to come home because their father wasn't going to make it much longer. She came immediately and they cared for him until the end. While she was home she had to fly back to Chicago for a meeting and then came back the next morning to be with her father until he passed.

Your honor, I am attaching a copy of a letter I gave to Barbara after her father's death. He wrote the letter when she was just 11 years old. Please read it.

I love her so much and she has helped me to be strong and accepting since my husband's death. We were married for 68 years. Even now with everything going on with her, she

tries to come home every month or every other month to check on me, to make me laugh, and to just spend time with me. I am 89 years old and I do not want to leave here knowing that my child is in jail. I know Barbara accepted her responsibility because that is who she is and she would never make an excuse if she learned she did something wrong.

Judge Chang, she made one mistake. She did not even know she was making a mistake. There was no evil intent. She has told me that she is very very sorry and sorry that she has disgraced the family. I tried to tell her that she did not disgrace the family, that she made a mistake and was too trusting of other people. Please, please have mercy your honor on my baby and do not lock her up. Give her some punishment where she can still pay for what she did but where she can be near me and her family while she pays for her action.

I thank you Your Honor for considering my request.

Sincerely,



Helen B. Lee

my Oldest

I am about to tell of my child the oldest. Even though she hasn't as yet seen many years on this earth, I would say she has come a long way. A child who can express deep feeling & sympathy for her love ones, who can pay a compliment as well as a fault in such a manner, as ~~too~~ ~~said~~ some could feel good & yet feel bad at the same time if this is at all possible.

A pretty bright child in some things, yet as in all of us there are some faults. But it is my belief time alone can make right the wrong, - and after all a child is but a child but once, - and as yet she has not reached 12 yrs of age.

My child is a fighter. This I mean, that she will <sup>first</sup> to attain a goal, & to her no goal seem to high, defeat doesn't seem to be an exception, not when she knows there is a answer to the problem at hand, and with this willingness she will go ~~and~~ ahead.

Some day I look forward with great pride, That here, is my little girl, now a young lady, one who any mother & father would be proud to have, one who needs

Yet is needed by some one, one who  
can give love for she herself is loved, not  
just by her family, but her friends & strangers  
alike.

In closing, I say as I once heard it  
said, to one near & very dear to me, by a Bishop  
of my faith, quote. "Be ye steadfast" unquote.

Ms. Patricia Lee



February 12, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

My name is Patricia Lee and I am Barbara Byrd Bennett's only sibling. We have always been extremely close. I have friends who have brothers and/or sisters but none of them are fortunate enough to have the bond we have. Barbara is not only my sister, she's my best friend and confidant. I have always been able to tell her everything and have her weigh in with her opinion. Sometimes I didn't like what she had to say, but I knew it was coming from a good place and she only had my best interest at heart. Barbara has always been honest and straight forward with me. We have shared so many secrets over the years, each knowing that they would never be repeated.

As a little girl, I remember thinking that Barbara was the coolest person on the planet. When she skipped eighth grade I changed my thinking to coolest *and* smartest person on the planet. I wanted to be just like her. As the older sister, Barbara took her role very seriously. She protected her little sister and was always there to shield me from harm. Barbara probably doesn't remember this but I do. We had to go to the store across the street from where we lived. As usual we were not crossing at the corner and I didn't see that a car was coming. She pushed me (hard) out of the way and was almost hit in the process of trying to make sure that I was safe.

At an early age I knew that Barbara's calling was to be an educator. She always had to be the teacher whenever we played school. When she got a little older, perhaps the sixth grade, it went beyond playing. Barbara would tutor our neighbors children. When she was in high school, and during her early college years Barbara actually began to counsel them and encourage them to keep on the education track. Three of them that I know of actually went on to college.

Barbara had a tremendous impact on my career decisions. I had wanted to be a nurse, but seeing her in action made me change my mind. Hence I went on to pursue a career in education. When I graduated from college I was able to work at a Day Care Center teaching three and four year old children. At the time all you needed to

do this was a bachelors degree and a certain number of education credits. As the guidelines changed I had to become the assistant teacher. Barbara didn't let up until I went back to school to get my Masters degree and state certification in early childhood education. I went on to teach with the NYC department of education. Not to pat myself on the back, but my fellow teachers, administrators from the district office, and principals from other schools, who sent teachers to watch me teach, all suggested that I move up to an administrative position. I spent seventeen years as a teacher. Some of those years were spent in the classroom, some as a prekindergarten specialist, and some as a curriculum congruence coordinator. Time and time again Barbara told me that I now needed to get a masters degree in supervision and administration. She was relentless with her pushing. Yes, Barbara my big sister and my mentor was guiding me once again in the right direction so I listened. I got my masters degree and state certification in Supervision and Administration. Thanks to Barbara I spent the last eighteen years of my career as an assistant principal. I will be eternally grateful.

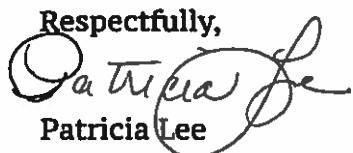
When my daughter, Alysia, was born there was no hesitation and no second thoughts on my part. I knew Barbara had to be her Godmother. None of us are promised tomorrow and I knew if anything were to happen to me she would be the one person I could count on to raise my daughter as I would and to love her unconditionally, as she does her own daughter.

When Alysia, became school age it was a no brainer that she would attend Barbara's school. She was an excellent principal with an exemplar record.

Judge Chang I know my sister made an awful mistake, one she will regret for the rest of her life. I was there with her when she stood before you and pled guilty accepting responsibility for her part in all of this. She knew that there would be consequences to pay. While it was one of the most difficult things to hear her say, her accepting responsibility came as no surprise to me. There is no doubt that she is truly so sorry for this lapse in judgement. She has been serving her own imposed sentence since that day in October 2015. She is depressed, constantly crying, afraid to death, and worried about the rest of the family. She continually apologizes to the family and her friends. She puts on the smiles for our mother, because she doesn't want her to worry so much. Barbara has asked me, more than once what I think will happen to her. What will happen to Nailah, the boys, and Bruce. How are they going to get thru this without her there to help/guide them. How will my daughter and my granddaughter handle this. How will she live thru it and our mother. Your Honor my mother is eighty-nine years old and Barbara is so afraid she will not make it if she is incarcerated. I don't know how I'll be able to handle it without her.

Your Honor I asked you to please have mercy on Barbara when sentencing her.

Respectfully,

  
Patricia Lee

February 13, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

I have known Barbara Byrd Bennett for many years now. I met Barbara thru my niece, Lisa Ruda, when they worked together.

One holiday, when Barbara's mom and dad, were not coming in for Easter, and she could not go there also, my sister invited Barbara and her family so they would not be by themselves. From then on, we remained friends.

Barbara and her family were there for graduations, weddings and special occasions. I know if we ever needed anything, Barbara would have helped us. I trusted her and her opinion.

I always admired Barbara for her warmth, kind intentions and wisdom.

At one point in time, my husband had lost his job. We had three children in school, which meant three tuition payments and we were devastated by this loss. Barbara was able to point us in a direction that enabled my husband to get a new job and put us back on track. I will NEVER, EVER, forget this act of kindness.

I appreciate your time and consideration

Sincerely,

*Sandi Marino*

Sandi Marino

[REDACTED]

Marco Materassi, Esq.



January 26, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

**Dear Honorable Edmond E. Chang:**

My name is Marco Materassi. I am the son of Leaura Materassi-Eaton, who is a lifetime friend and professional colleague of Barbara Byrd-Bennett. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a brief insight into the world I grew up in as it was shaped by my mother and by Mrs. Byrd-Bennett, and in doing so to comment on the Barbara Byrd-Bennett that I know and have grown to love over the last three decades. I met Mrs. Byrd-Bennett, who I refer to as Barbara, and who has become like a second mother to me, during the late 1980's when I was a student at Columbia College in Manhattan's Upper West-Side. At the time, my mother was working in New York City School District 5's Central Office. Morningside Avenue, a beautiful historic street, formed the Eastern border of the pristine, Ivy League world where I was studying. Morningside Avenue also happened to be the dividing line between the area generally referred to as Central Harlem and the "up and coming" Upper West Side, where Columbia University featured prominently as an institute of fine higher education and where gentrification of the neighborhood was in full bloom. Morningside Avenue was also the passage that crossed 123rd Street, the street where District 5's Central Offices were located. District 5 was located in one of the poorest and most densely populated areas of New York City. This proximity between the world where my collegiate and intellectual development was unfolding and the world where my mother's and Barbara's educational careers had intersected is what created the opportunity for the countless quick trips, lunches, walks and other encounters that cemented the foundation of my relationship with Barbara. She was there every day alongside my mother. What I witnessed as I began to know Barbara was two strong, hard-working women working as a team to bring the possibility of the type of education that I was already enjoying to the children of that District; working there side by side, day in and day out, within a stone's throw of my dorm room.

After graduating from Columbia and taking some time figure out my next move, I was fortunate enough to be accepted into Harvard Law School. During my time at Harvard, I first met Nailah, Barbara's amazing daughter who has remained a dear friend to me ever since. Nailah, like myself also attended law school. While I clerked for the Honorable Hector M. Laffitte, in the United States District of Puerto Rico, Nailah went on become an assistant US Attorney, in the Southern District of

► Marco Materassi, Esq.

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New York. Since then her career has far surpassed mine and I am consistently in awe of her achievements. As the parallels in Nailah's and my life grew, so did the bond and professional stature of Barbara and my mother.

What I recall most vividly from all those years when Barbara and my mother were in Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago was a question that always perplexed me. I had come to believe, through my early experience at a corporate law firm, and by watching the careers of my college friends and by what I saw in the media that people in the private sector, meaning executives in the corporate world, were the hardest working people. Yet when I would speak to my mother, she was regularly getting home from work at 11pm, midnight or sometimes later. Meetings beginning at 7am, sometimes even 6:00am would then follow those long nights. I remember worrying about my Mom going out in the cold Midwest mornings and being afraid, she might fall on the ice or catch a terrible cold. Eventually, I came to the realization, there was something very different about these public servants, there was something very different about my mother and Barbara and the other people Barbara brought to her team. I began to realize that Barbara was holding everyone that worked closely with her to the absolute highest standards of accountability. I began to truly understand that my mother and Barbara were not working at a job, but that they were living their life's calling; and what a noble calling that was: to marshal the best possible mix of financial, infrastructure, human and political resources and to deliver the best possible high quality, early education to America's inner city children. During these years although my mother and Barbara might have been very close friends and esteemed colleagues, this provided no quarter from the hard tasks they set themselves to. Barbara's work, her standards of excellence for herself and the people around her, the sense of accountability to the most vulnerable, under-privileged children set the tone for the entire educational bureaucracy in the cities where they worked, and it is something that I grew deeply to admire and love about Barbara. Had Barbara chosen a career in the private sector, she would have careened into a seven-figure income at a fortune 500 company without batting an eyelash. Yet she chose to stay in the trenches and fight the fight to lift educational levels for poor, disadvantaged kids because those kids and their futures were her clients. Those kids and their futures were her true North, her lodestone. The same was true of my mother. Barbara brought a level of dedication, accountability and excellence to a culture that needed a shot in the arm because that culture was failing those children and she and my mother knew it and they have spent nearly every minute of the last thirty years trying redress that wrong. As good of a mother Leaura Materassi may have been to me and as good as mother Barbara Byrd-Bennett may have been to Nailah, the fact of the matter is their true children, were the children of those districts. And the amount of time I have been able to spend in this life with my mother and the amount of time Nailah has had with her mother, and Nailah's children have had with their grand-mother has been deeply sliced into by their sense of purpose and dedication to the children of those districts.

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► Marco Materassi, Esq.

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Whether you like or not, when your father is a professor and your mother a hard-working teacher and you go to schools like Columbia and Harvard, and you spend years as an attorney and an employer, the fact of the matter is that you do develop an internal processor that assesses people. What I know about Barbara is that she is a good woman, a loyal woman, a hard, hard working woman, a brilliant woman, a fearless leader and a relentless, passionate advocate for America's most disadvantaged children. This is the Barbara I know, Judge Chang.

Thank you for taking the time to read this admittedly very personal salute to my second mom.

*Marco Materassi*

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**Marco Materassi, Esq.**

Jon J. McCollum

January 6, 2017

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Greetings Judge Chang,

My name is Jon McCollum. I am the cousin of Barbara Byrd Bennett. Barbara has been an intricate part of my life since I was born. She is much more than a cousin. Barbara is a mentor and role model for me. Living in Harlem, New York was tough for me as a child. I witnessed much violence and was surrounded by crime. It was a way of life in my area. Barbara showed me that my life as a young African-American male could be so much more if I worked hard and stayed focused. I studied hard, never got into trouble, and because of my guidance from Barbara I followed my passion to help others. I joined the New York City Police Department.

I would witness Barbara at family events (picnics, parties, etc.) taking off on her own for a brief period to read, grade papers, write reports, etc. I remember her always pushing herself to the limit to make life better for her students and the community. She'd work long, long hours to make sure everything was in order for her students and their parents.

I was proud when I could share my NYPD career stories with her. One of the first phone calls I made was to Barbara when I was accepted into the New York City Police Department. The second phone call I was proud to make to her was when I graduated from the Police Academy. I thanked Barbara for showing me for so many, many years that hard work and being focused pays off. All thru my career Barbara has been an inspiration to me. She would always remind me to strive for even greater heights. I was elated when I was able to call her with the good news that I had been promoted to the rank of Detective with the New York City Police Department. Her words to strive for even greater achievements continued to motivate me. I saw how Barbara elevated from a teacher, to a principal, to an administrator. Barbara never stopped trying to help people. Given the world we live in, I questioned how I could service/help/protect an even greater number of people. I ultimately transferred to the Intelligence Bureau of the New York City Police Department. This is one of the most elite units in the Police Department. I was now investigating terrorist cases. This transfer only happened due to Barbara's guidance,

encouragement, and inspiration. I called Barbara and told her as soon as I was transferred. She was so happy for me and so proud of me. After over twenty-four years of service with the New York City Police Department the time for me to retire had arrived. Similar to Barbara I gave I over half of my life to public service. Many people have come to me in over two decades in Law Enforcement to say thank you. I smile because much of the thanks I got from them I wanted to pass on to Barbara for putting me in the position to be compassionate to people and to help them. I owe much of my life philosophy and career to Barbara. Barbara has been a blessing in my life. She has touched hundreds of thousands of lives in a positive way, not only from her hard work, but through people like me.

Barbara has given that same love, passion for excellence, and commitment to my children. They often speak about how wonderful she is. The time and patience she has shown them is truly remarkable. As busy as Barbara is she has never forgotten my children for the holidays, or special occasions. My children cherish her as a role model and mentor, as do I.

I am aware that Barbara has made a bad mistake. I am also aware that Barbara has accepted full responsibility for this. This error in judgment does not take away from her many decades of public service, unwavering commitment for excellence, and overwhelming accomplishments helping children and others. Barbara's dedication to education and her love for her family is legendary.

Barbara is one of the most loving, caring and compassionate people I know. The positive energy that Barbara has given to this world should not go unnoticed. She continues to be proactive and giving back to society every day. Barbara's positive influence will continue to resonate for many generations.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to tell you about an amazing and beautiful person, while reliving some marvelous memories.

Thank you for your time Judge Chang.

Respectfully yours,  
Detective NYPD (Retired)

  
Don J. McCollum

**Reverend Dr. Otis Moss, Jr.**  
*Pastor Emeritus*  
*Olivet Institutional Baptist Church*



February 21, 2017

The Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Chang:

I write this letter in behalf of Dr. Barbara Byrd-Bennett, former CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. It was in the above capacity that I came to know and respect Mrs. Byrd-Bennett.

During Mrs. Byrd-Bennett's tenure as CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, we witnessed phenomenal and historic change and improvements. New program initiatives and innovations, new facilities, renovations and tens of millions of dollars were committed at the local and state levels that are literally being utilized at this very hour.

A full decade following Mrs. Byrd-Bennett's tenure we can document a long list of achievements that are quantifiable and ongoing.

I am fully aware that Mrs. Byrd-Bennett has admitted to a serious, grievous and regretful mistake that she will profoundly regret for the remainder of her time on this earth. Our fervent prayers are with her in these critical hours and painful days.

In light of all the above, I offer my sixty years of pastoral, ministerial, civic and human engagement to help Mrs. Barbara Byrd-Bennett restore, reclaim and rebuild her wounded life to the fullest extent possible. I do so with knowledge and witness to the power of grace and mercy in redemption and restoration for wounded humanity.

Sincerely,

The Reverend Dr. Otis Moss, Jr.

OMJ:se

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

This letter is a letter of character regarding Barbara Byrd-Bennett.

I have known Barbara Byrd-Bennett for over 30 years of my life. My mom and Byrd-Bennett have been friends for over 40 years and professionally developed in education together. Their bond spiraled in to an extremely close relationship as not just friends, but as family. As our families have grown, the bond has been extended throughout our families

I naturally became extremely close with Barbara's daughter, Nailah. I am so blessed to have her in my life. She has been the sister I wouldn't have known to ask for. We have an incredible bond, one that I will cherish forever.

As a young girl, I spent a lot of time at Barbara's house where she cooked lots of food and baked her infamous white cake with chocolate frosting. We always played games in the family room like Pictionary, Monopoly and scrabble with delight but sprinkled with a twist of competitive juice. She encouraged us to think outside of the box when playing Pictionary, she provided teachable moments when purchasing property when playing Monopoly and we knew "Auntie Barbara's" vocabulary was incredibly broad so we needed to increase ours in order to play/win in the game of Scrabble.

I often met Barbara and Nailah over at her parent's house, where they too enjoyed gathering around delicious food. My favorite dish made by her grandfather was sausage sautéed in peppers and onions. Barbara's parents are affectionately called "Mama and Poppy" and they were and are the sweetest couple I know. Their shining example of parenting, love and family is a direct reflection of the kind hart Barbara is.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett is not just someone I identify as Auntie Barbara, there is an incredible amount of meaning and influence in that name. She has positively shaped and influenced many aspects of my life, she is the core reason why I took a chance on moving to Cleveland, she is the reason why I pursued and completed my Master's Degree at Baldwin Wallace. I am a better women, daughter, sister and wife because of her great influence on my life.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett is highly regarded in my family. We know her to be caring, loving, honest, trustworthy, good and moral person for whom the present charge is quite uncharacteristic. She has been a loyal, helpful and considerate member of my family since I've known her. She is the God-Mother of my children, Olivia and Jasmine and they, love her dearly. My family and I frequently visit her home for Sunday dinners, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Eve fun at her daughter's home.

Barbara Byrd-Bennet is an incredible daughter to her parent's, wife to her husband, mom to her daughter, grandmother to her Grandson's and friend to a host of people. I am personally aware of sacrifices she has made in her life. She made an enormous sacrifice in caring for me for a short period of time in my mother's absence and I am forever grateful to her for that. I've also witnessed

her care for her ailing father who battled cancer. I have rarely witnessed such love, commitment, dedication, selflessness for no personal gain but all in the name of love! Since her dad's passing, I now watch her, with the same love, dedication and admiration, care for her mom who is aging. As the eldest sibling in her family, I watch her take pride in being a great example to not just her sister but all of her family.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett's legacy is not only one of being the pillar of her family, she is also a force in many communities! Her lifelong work and professional legacy is to educate children. She has been a servant and leader in major cities and has been appointed to lead several large inner city school Districts in an effort to provide all children an opportunity to be successful!

I could cite many instances of her practical goodness as a human being... While I am aware that this is a serious offense, I know she is extremely remorseful and has expressed her deepest regret for her involvement in this matter. She is aware that her involvement in this matter requires punishment, however, I am hopeful that you will consider Barbara Byrd Bennett and all the good she has done for so many!

Thank you,

Melody C. Patterson

November 22, 2016

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

**RE: Support of Barbara Byrd-Bennett Ahead of Sentencing**

Your Honor:

I am writing on behalf of Barbara Byrd Bennett ("Ms. Barbara," to me) to request your leniency toward her during sentencing.

I met Ms. Barbara in 2013 through my relationship with her daughter, Nailah Byrd, my dear friend of five years. Through my relationship with her daughter, I have gotten to know Ms. Barbara well; and my admiration and respect for her has only grown. There are three things I admire about her, in particular: she is one of the kindest and most supportive persons I know; she has a passion for the education of children; and she loves her family beyond words.

One can tell a lot about a person's character in how they carry themselves during adversity. When I first came to know Ms. Barbara, I admired her strength, humility, grace and kindness. And since this case arose, though she is no doubt saddened by this turn of events, she has continued to exhibit, without diminishment, those same noteworthy characteristics. Not only have I never seen or heard of her trying to advocate for herself or make excuses regarding this matter; I have seen the time and energy she continues putting into caring for and seeing to the well-being of her friends and family.

And I see the passion she still has for the education of children – particularly those who are underserved. Whenever she and my husband, who works in public education, discuss issues regarding education, she still speaks with great passion and concern; and she often gives him (much appreciated) advice on how he can help his students excel in their education; and how important it is to teach the key lessons that will help his students become productive and successful adults.

As to Ms. Barbara's love for her family, it is difficult for me to put into words what I see. Her bond with her daughter is powerful and touching. Though I see their hearts break about their upcoming separation, what I see most is the strength and support they give each other. And in seeing Ms. Barbara with her twin grandsons, Jaelen and Khalil Suggs, I always see the special love and fondness she has for them. When I see her around them, I see her eyes fill with overflowing love for them. Indeed, whenever the issue of her upcoming departure surfaces her focus always turns to the boys and her concern for how they will fare in the world and how deeply she regrets that she will miss much of their developing years. But nevertheless, she stays strong and continues instilling valuable lessons in them at every opportunity.

Although I've known Ms. Barbara only three years, the occasions I have spent with her have shown me what a remarkable person she is.

I respectfully ask for your compassion toward her during this process.

Sincerely,



Angela L. Simmons

Edmenson Suggs



March 1, 2017

Dear Judge Chang,

My name is Ed Suggs and I am Barbara Byrd Bennett's son in-law. I am writing this letter in support of my mother, Barbara Byrd Bennett. I have known Barbara for over 21 years. From the moment I met her she has been a kind and caring role model to me.

I grew up in a single female household in Brooklyn, New York. I attended public schools throughout my formative years. Although I lettered in four sports, football was my passion. Fortunately, I received an athletic scholarship to play football at the University of Maryland. After graduating college and working for a few years, I decided to go to law school. During my second year of law school I met and began dating my wife, Nailah Byrd, Barbara's only child. My second year in law school was also when I met Barbara. When my wife introduced us, I was incredibly nervous. However my nervousness quickly disappeared. Barbara made an indelible impression on me. I remember Barbara making me feel very welcomed and at ease. It was as if I had known her all my life. She was easy to talk with and definitely made me believe she cared about our conversation. During that first conversation I mentioned where I grew up and what schools I attended. Because of her work in the New York City public education system she was familiar with the schools and some of the administrators. I remember being impressed and thinking how passionate she was about education and, most importantly, about the children she served. At the time I had no idea that she was the CEO of Cleveland Schools. She just seemed like someone I had known all my life—like my mom.

After 9/11 I relocated to Northeast Ohio and married Nailah. A year after we were married, my wife and I were blessed to have twin boys. From the moment they were born my mother in-law has been a vital part of their lives. She absolutely adores them and they love their grandma. It has been amazing to watch the bond my boys have formed with Barbara. As a man who grew up without a father I have learned many important lessons from Barbara on instilling a love of learning and the importance of having good character and being a person of high integrity. My sons are now twelve years old and very active. For the past seven years my sons have played a number of sports including baseball, basketball, football, and soccer. Barbara has attended every sporting event and school activity that her schedule would permit. For her grandsons, she has also attend school functions like concerts and parent teacher meetings. No matter what was on her schedule or if she was living in another state, she was always there for my children. Indeed, my boys have come to expect that their "grandma" will attend any and every special event in their lives. However, I do believe that it inspires my sons to see Barbara in the crowd. It has been fun to watch her cheer for them although sports is not her forte and sometimes she doesn't even understand, but she cheers for them. Needless to say, this will soon change. Watching her interact with my sons has taught my family how important family traditions are and how important it is for family to remain united...no matter what the circumstances.

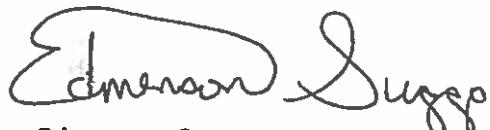
Over the years at countless family dinners and youth sporting events, I have shared many conversations with Barbara about how important family is to her and her passion for public education. Although I am a licensed attorney, her inspiration and guidance are two of the reasons I have pursued a career in education. Although difficult to put my feelings about Barbara into words, Barbara means everything to all of us.

It has been extremely difficult for my family over the past few years to deal with this situation. The difficulty and pain of having to explain to my twins what has happened and the real possibility of what will likely happen to their grandmother is more difficult than one could imagine. They still don't fully grasp that although "grandma" made a bad decision and is repentant, why she is in trouble. Nor can they comprehend that she will be going to prison.

They cannot imagine. Nonetheless, true to her character, Barbara has continued to be as active in our lives as she has always been.

Your honor, I fully understand Barbara has committed a crime and that there is a punishment related to that crime. I also know that she has dedicated over 40 years of her life to educating underserved children. She has lived with the guilt of her actions for the past two years and I have witnessed my strong proud role model reduced to a weak downtrodden person who breaks down at any moment, weeps and must leave the room to compose herself. I pray you will find compassion in your heart and show leniency to my mom in your sentencing. Her lifelong dedication to educating children has been tarnished and she has suffered enough. I humbly ask that you impose a minimal prison term.

Sincerely,



Edmenson Suggs

Honorable Edmond E. Chang  
United States District Court  
Northern District Of Illinois  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Joan Wyatt-Moorer  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Barbara Byrd Bennett

**Who Is She and What She Means To Me**

Hello Judge Chang,

My name is Joan Wyatt – Moorer. I am affectionately called Sissy by my family. Before I can tell you about Barbara I need to tell you a little about myself. I am now a fifty-eight year old woman. I was born in Harlem to a drug addicted mother and I had not even met my father until I was twenty years old. Because of my mother's drug addiction I was being raised by my great aunt who was also Barbara's grandmother. I had two brothers neither of whom lived with me. I did have other cousins that lived in the household as well. I was the eldest child.

I was not what one would consider a bad child. I was instead a young rebel. I was terribly misunderstood. I knew my mother couldn't raise me and I hated her for choosing drugs over her children. Me, having been her only daughter should have had a special bond only a mother and daughter can share. I would run away from home often. I felt I was not important. I would get punished for leaving but my Aunt never asked why. She would never just talk to me or tell me she loved me. She thought of me as a liar, and sometimes she was right but not always. She was not a bad person. She just never made me feel loved.

Barbara who was a little older than me would always try to understand what I was feeling. She would take me to her house often and spend time with only me. She would talk to me but, more importantly she would listen to me. She trusted me and believed the things I would say to her. She never gave me a reason to lie to her because, I felt I could tell her anything. When I would do things wrong, she would suggest other ways I might be able to handle situations. Even though we were cousins I looked up to her. I felt like she was the mother that I so desperately needed.

When Barbara gave birth to her daughter I was hurt. I didn't want to share her and I was sure she would no longer love me the same. Not true! Our bond became even stronger and shortly after she took me in to live with her. I felt like her daughter. She treated me like her eldest daughter and Nailah was my baby sister.

Education was always very important to Barbara. It was the number one rule. At the time I had no real interest in school. I went because I had to. Barbara didn't allow me to take any shortcuts when it came to school. I didn't have to be the smartest in the class but, I had to give one hundred percent effort at all times, and she would do anything for me. We would do almost everything together. She was my Mother, Friend and, Cousin.

When I began having children Barbara helped me raise them. She gave me the tools I needed to be a mom, and as with me she and my eldest daughter developed a bond. She had become her grandmother. A loving cycle would begin yet again.

I'll Love her always,

  
Joan Wyatt-Moorer